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"You see there a table, with two knives sticking in the center—one for each of us. Come! The door will be locked by Monsieur Ledocq, Richard Redfire, when we have entered, and the room will not be opened before to-morrow."

OR, TO THE BITTER END.

A Romance of the Silver Hills.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
"COOL CONRAD," "SUNSHINE SAM,"
"VOLCANO," "THE COLDGRIP"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SYBIL, THE NAMELESS.

ONE of the best known men in New York was Richard Redfire.

A few years past thirty, with a well-knit figure and a handsome face, and with money at command, he was as much sought after as any man in Gotham.

His home was one of elegance, which he shared with no woman, for he was not married, and the constant wonder was why he had not chosen a wife from among the many beautiful women of his acquaintance.

Then there came a time when Richard Redfire suddenly disappeared. One day the city saw his house shut up, the shutters closely drawn, and the doors locked.

As he lived with a single body-servant, a small, humpbacked man past his own age, there were no people to betray the secret of his disappearance, if, indeed, it was a secret, and the few who questioned Zero, as the dwarf was called, found him a sealed letter.

Days passed, but Richard Redfire did not return, and at last, at the solicitation of his friends, the police broke into the house to investigate.

They found nothing, not a scrap nor a line, that threw any light on the mystery.

Then, as suddenly as his master, Zero vanished.

This, of course, only heightened the mystery, rendered the puzzle more inscrutable.

One person, however, knew something about the vanishing of Richard Redfire; but she did not come forward to enlighten the police.

It was the night preceding Richard's absence. The hour was nine. The young man was seated in his library with a mass of papers before him. Suddenly he heard a vehicle stop in front of his house, and a moment later the outer door was heard to open, then there were footsteps in the hall, and he turned to behold a closely veiled woman enter the room.

There was an empty chair near the table, as if Richard had been keeping it for her, and as she took it her face was revealed in the full, mellow light that pervaded the apartment.

And it was a beautiful face, animated in expression, with finely chiseled lips and sloe-black eyes, such as one meets but rarely.

A smile flitted over her radiant face as she looked across the little table at Richard, and then, pointing to the papers before him, said, laughingly:

"I see now that you are in earnest."

"I thought you would believe it some time," was the reply.

"When do you go?"

"To-night."

"What have you discovered?"

"I think I have found a clue—one link in the chain."

"The first link?" smiled the visitor.

"The first link," echoed Richard.

"My blessing and my hopes go with you, Richard Redfire!" and the fine eyes of the speaker gleamed more brightly, while her extended hand touched that of the young man, as she added:

"I wish I could go with you. I may join you if the battle proves a long one. I am tearing you from the life you enjoy—from the excitement of city life. I am sending you from civilization almost to barbarism, for where you are going life is indeed wild and rough and men are fierce as the red savages."

"Do you think so, Sybil?"

"What else can life be out there?" cried she.

"If, as you think, your trail leads you into the heart of the Rockies and among the wild mining-camps, where toughs of every description abound, you must not expect to meet seraphs and gentlemen. No, Richard Redfire. You will encounter dangers of the wildest sort. And it is I who sends you among them. What am I, to ask such a service?"

She arose to her feet, with her exquisite figure drawn to the full of its queenly stature, while Richard leaned back in his chair and admiringly contemplated her.

"You ask me what you are, Sybil," said he. "One of the most beautiful women I have ever seen."

"There!" with a protesting gesture; "this is no time for flattery."

"And no time for truth, either?" asked Redfire.

"Flattery is seldom truth," was the answer. "I will tell you what I am. I am a woman without a name—the child of mystery. I have come to you to help solve that mystery, Richard. It was by accident, as I have told you, that I discovered this roof sheltered a man, a part of whose life is unknown to the city he inhabits. You came from over-sea five years ago. You came here with money enough to build a dozen houses like this you live in. Men wondered where you acquired your wealth; but all agreed that it was not in this country."

Redfire smiled as the young woman paused.

"Beyond your residence in New York the shrewdest of them have failed to go," she continued.

"Have they tried to go back beyond my five years in New York?" inquired Richard.

"They have. They seem to lose the trail in the sea. But, I have not lost it there, you know. I have followed it, link by link, beyond the ocean, but not to injure you, Richard. Accident gave me the link that let me take up the balance of the chain. When I had it all, I said to myself: 'I have found the man I want,' and then I came to you. After all, I don't know whether the game is worth the sacrifice. You may lose your life in the land to which I am sending you, and for what?"

"It is for the righting of a great wrong!" exclaimed Redfire, "and then," with another smile, "it takes me back to the life I like."

"I understand you. You don't like this existence?"

"No! I detest it! My five years in New York have been years of torture. More than once I have thought of tearing off the mask I wear and going back to what I have been. I know the Wild West better than you think, Sybil. I touched the shores of this country before I set foot in Gotham. I followed a man once across the Atlantic, and lost him among the wild camps of Colorado."

"Lost him?" echoed the young lady. "I did not think—"

"That I ever lost my prey?" interrupted Richard. "Well, I lost that man, but ever since I have burned to go back and look for him. He was the only wanted person I ever lost, but fate was against me then, and for the first time in my life I came back empty-handed."

"Not as you will come back this time, I hope."

"No!" and the speaker's eyes glowed. "You are sending me back to the old life, Sybil, and I am not likely to celebrate my return to it by failure."

The beautiful girl looked steadily at the young man a few moments.

"I don't ask where you picked up the clue you think you have found," she spoke at length. "Don't tell me anything. I can be in the dark a little longer. You are going to solve the mystery of my life. You intend to follow up a trail which to me appears to lead toward the depths of perdition. Somehow or other, I seem to be linked to the roughs and toughs of the Wild West. I don't know why it is. Picked up a waif on the wharves of New York years ago, before I could remember the faces or the names of my parents, I can't go back very far. They tell me that after my finding I was visited by a man who looked like a returned miner, that he had the grime of the mountains in his beard even here in New York. You know that, after the last time he called, there was found in my cradle a piece of paper which said that I was the child without a name and the daughter of mystery. I have the paper still, and you have studied it a dozen times, Richard. Do you hope to find the writer? let me ask."

"I hope to find him if death has not claimed his own!" was the prompt response. "Let me see; it has been twenty-four years since—"

"But twenty-three," corrected Sybil with a smile. "Twenty-three years ago the person who stands before you was found on the pier with the stars looking down upon her. Am I not the babe of mystery? Am I worth the peril you are about to face? You know that I can give you but one reward—the eternal thanks and gratitude of Sybil the Nameless."

"That will be reward enough! I am willing to confront the unknown for it."

"Then, may Heaven guard you, Richard!" cried the young woman. "I have visited you unknown to-night. No one suspects who your last visitor is. To-morrow your house will be closed. New York will look at the shutters and wonder. Zero will be sought."

"But Zero will tell nothing!" assured Richard promptly.

"I know that. Days, weeks—perhaps months will pass away."

"Perhaps years," interrupted the man. "Oh, must I wait for years?" cried Sybil, in unaffected pain.

"You must wait till I come back," was the calm answer.

"You may never return."

"I will!" and the hand of Redfire dropped upon the documents on the table. "This is one of the cases in which I am going to come back to report. Your story has sent my blood tingling through my veins. It ends the torture of a life of ease, and it takes me back to the time when I was—yes, when I was Monsieur Ledocq, the American shadow of the Parisian police. You look at me, Sybil, as if I had opened a new book of mystery by those words," and a little laugh supplemented the man's speech. "Why, bless these New York detectives, they don't suspect that I ever followed an evil-doer except through newspaper accounts of crime! I have listened to their stories a thousand times, and when I replied with something in the same vein, actual experiences of my own, they wondered where I read or heard so much. But, enough of this, Sybil. The clock is spinning off the hour faster than I thought. I go at half-past ten."

There was a light cry on the woman's part as she noted the time, and the following moment she and Richard Redfire clasped hands across the table.

"I wish I could go with you—I would like to see you pick up the chain, link by link; but it cannot be! Go to the wilderness, but don't for one moment forget that the protecting prayers of Sybil, the Nameless, are with you!"

Then she threw his hands away with an impulsive effort, looked once more into his resolute face, and departed.

Richard Redfire stood at the table till he heard a carriage driven away.

"I would follow a man around the world at her wish!" said he, and then he went back to his papers.

That night, as we have said, Richard Redfire gave New York another mystery, and of the

hundreds who wondered what had become of him, not one thought of questioning Sybil the Nameless.

If they had, her lips would have been as silent as those of the faithful Zero.

CHAPTER II.

THE NIGHT NET.

WE have said that Zero the hunchback followed Richard Redfire's example, and vanished some time after his master.

He was not around when the police searched the house only to discover that its owner had left no traces of his whereabouts behind.

But the truth is, Zero had not left the city. Instead of following Richard, if that person had turned his face toward the Rockies, he had merely changed his quarters, going from the elegant mansion to a poor and rather dilapidated building not far from the East River.

During the day he was holed like an owl, but at night he would creep from his hiding-place, and disappear until past midnight; then he would come sneaking back like a fox returning to his den.

These visits of Zero were made to a plain-looking house which he always entered by the basement, and when in one of the rooms above, he was sure to find himself face to face with Sybil the Nameless.

There was one question which the woman always put to Zero, and its importance made it the opening one.

"Have you any news from him, Zero?"

Again and again the hunchback would shake his head, and a shadow of disappointment would steal over the woman's lovely face.

For days these visits were kept up, until one night, when Zero had let himself into the house, he found no one to greet him.

What had become of Sybil?

The hunchback waited a while, but she did not come; then he looked everywhere.

Sybil was not to be found!

Redfire's warder was disturbed and annoyed.

"I hope she has not been foolish enough to follow Richard," he exclaimed. "By Jove! I remember now hearing her say that she thought she could find him. Richard promised to keep me posted, but if he had to go into the Colorado mines, a letter has hardly had time to reach me."

Zero did not want to lose Sybil that night, for he had something important in his eyes to communicate. He, therefore, threw himself down on a convenient sofa to give her a little more time.

That night the hunchback did not sleep in his accustomed quarters on the river front.

The sofa proved a more alluring couch than his own hard bed, and the result was that when he opened his eyes it was daylight once more, and he was alone in Sybil's house.

Not once since Richard's disappearance had daylight caught him on the street. He had a dread of the police that made him shiver whenever he thought of them. He had promised Richard that he would not explain his absence to any one, and he did not know how he could get out of betraying his master if he should fall into the hands of the "cops."

So, after deliberation, he resolved to pass the day in Sybil's house. He would be safe there, and there was a likelihood that the Nameless would come back within its limits.

The hours dragged wearily away. Zero slept at intervals, as if to touch the sofa was to feel the wooings of slumber. The house afforded him several cold meals, which he did not hesitate to appropriate, but Sybil did not come, and he was troubled.

At last he began to turn the leaves of a book of poems which he found on the table in the room where he had passed the night.

His sharp eyes detected a slight pencil-mark drawn under a little word, then further on he found another and still a third.

It did not take Zero long to discover that the underscored words when placed side by side found a message, and his next thought was that Sybil had left it for him!

Then Zero became very industrious with the book. He went back to the beginning, and found the first word beneath which Sybil, or some one else, had drawn a pencil.

After a while a peculiar smile accompanied by a look of surprise announced the solution of the puzzle, and then the hunchback of Gotham read the following:

"Keep the secret of Richard's absence. I have gone to seek him. Beware! Ever be on the alert. Run at the slightest sound of *their* approach. I shall not return till I have found him or solved the mystery for myself; or until vengeance has been taken if vengeance is needed. Be true; be secret; be wise!"

SYBIL.

"This is intended for me," muttered Zero. "She knew I would try to trail her, but how came she to think that the book would attract me? I must beware, she says. Beware of whom? Who are *they*; and how came Sybil to find them out? 'She knows more than I know, certainly, so I will be wary and on guard more than ever.'"

It was another mystery—an added trouble for the hunchback.

He replaced the book, but not until he had carefully erased the pencil-marks; then, without looking any longer for the girl he went back to the sofa to sleep till night should cover his retreat.

When he awoke he found that night's somber wings were spread once more over the city.

He crept stealthily from the house and made his way back to his own lodgings, but, uneasy in mind and wide awake with his anxiety, he went down to the river and perched his misshapen figure on the very edge of the pier.

This was a nightly pastime. Redfire had picked him up along the water, and he apparently believed that his one streak of good luck would be followed by another if he frequented his old haunts.

"That's the chunk of deformity," whispered a man to his companion as the two looked around a pile of goods at the little object, which was Zero, perched above the restless water.

"We don't want to make any mistakes," was the reply.

"That is Zero, Redfire's shadow—the one he left behind when he went away. If we let the chance slip now we may never get another."

"We won't let it slip," and the speaker started forward.

"Be careful," admonished his companion. "If he hears you, ten chances to one that he jumps into the river and gets away like the wharf-rat that he is." "Take the net with you," and a singular looking object was drawn from beneath the speaker's coat and thrust into his companion's hands.

In a moment a man was slipping upon Zero with the tread of a cat.

The thing called a net by the one who remained behind proved to be a woof of meshes secured after a peculiar manner to a rubber frame. A strong cord several feet long was attached to this pliable frame.

Soon the night prowler stopped a short distance from Zero, directly behind him; then he raised the net, and threw the snare as deftly as a lassoer launches his cord, and all at once the captured fly was struggling in the spider's web!

Zero sprung up at the first touch of the net, but was jerked backward before he could realize what had caught him, and in a twinkling he was a prisoner!

"Sybil did not warn me without reason!" thought he. "I have been caught by the men who want the secret!"

The net was dextrously wrapped about Zero's face and the upper part of his body, and, without a chance to sound the alarm, he was hustled from the pier, and into an alley where not a ray of light was seen.

The hunchback struggled no longer, for an effort of that sort would have been useless, but let his captors take him on without a word.

By and by he heard a door open and shut, then he was pushed into a chair and his wrists were secured to the arms beyond the possibility of escape.

Suddenly the apartment, dark as a tomb before, was flooded with light, and Zero saw his captors for the first time.

They were men of stalwart build. The lower half of their faces was concealed by velvet masks which completely prevented all recognition of their features.

Zero saw that in physique they were alike enough to be natural brothers, but he had no thought that they were.

"Why didn't you listen?" asked one of the pair as his eyes twinkled at the hunchback. "A fellow who comes out only at night should have his ears about him."

Zero gave the man a scornful look in return. "Get down to business," said the other, a little impatient.

"So I will. Richard didn't take you along, I see," the interlocutor continued.

No answer from the prisoner.

"Where's your tongue, Caliban?" the man exclaimed, his dark eyes flashing. "Wouldn't Richard take you with him on the trail?"

"Trail? What trail?" asked Zero.

"The trail to the mines of the Silver Hills. Why didn't he take you?"

"I know nothing about the trail."

"Ha! nothing about Richard's absence either, we suppose?"

Zero was again silent.

"Come," and the masked face came close to his own. "What took Richard away so suddenly? Of course he left his destination with you?"

"Of course," answered Zero, "he did nothing of the kind!"

The two men exchanged glances.

"Won't you tell us, eh?" cried the first mask.

"Do you refuse to point out Redfire's trail?"

"I don't know it and if I did you'd never be the wiser, you thief of the night," was the prisoner's bitter reply.

The questioner stepped back, with a half-suppressed curse for his reply. Alongside the outer door hung a rope with a handle attached.

"Never mind. The trail will be found, Zero," he said, with a fiend-like laugh, and the next second a jerking of the cord opened the floor at the hunchback's feet.

CHAPTER III.

ONE OF THE SAINTS.

THE prisoner and the chair disappeared in a twinkling; the trap came back to its level position, and the two laughed most wickedly as they left the hunchback to his fate.

At near the same hour of this startling occurrence in the heart of New York, a dilapidated wagon drawn by a pair of poor mules entered a mining-camp in Colorado.

The camp was not far from the Utah boundary, and as it was somewhat isolated, it had a population peculiarly its own. It was situated in what was known as the Silver Hills country, and some of the mines by which it was surrounded yielded enormously.

Bumblebee City, or "Bumble," as the camp was called for short, consisted of more than sixty grouped cabins. It had the inevitable camp saloon and card dens, and the only thing it did lack was the presence of woman.

The wagon entered Bumblebee City at a slow pace. The mules looked fagged out, and the wagon itself, with its torn curtains and almost paintless running gear, matched the team to perfection.

The driver was a man of forty, with a sleek though counterfeit sanctimonious look. His black garments had a shiny appearance imparted to them by much wear, and his long and well-oiled locks he kept brushed behind his ears.

The Mormon spoke out in every detail of the man's make-up, and the fact that he came from toward Utah was, in itself, enough to define his status.

Behind him, in the depths of the wagon, sat a young woman not more than twenty.

Unlike the man, she was well, even expensively, dressed, but there lurked in her deep-blue eyes a downcast look, and on her face a dejected expression.

No one seemed to see the team until it had reached the middle of the camp, when the driver reined in the mules and hailed a man who was studying the outfit with considerable curiosity.

"Is this Bumble?" asked the wayfarer, as the miner came up.

"Ye kin bet it ar' nothin' else," was the response, and then the speaker gave the questioner a close look and started perceptibly.

"Where's your hotel?" was the next inquiry.

"We've got none but Durg's."

"Where is it?"

"I'll show ye."

The citizen of Bumble placed himself alongside the mules and the driver cracked his whip over their ears and started them forward.

"Don't I know that chap?" thought the miner. "Thar's somethin' about his face that looks familiar, an' I'm tryin' ter place him. When I get him in the light at Durg's mebbe I kin fix him solid in my head. He's a Saint. Any one kin tell that by the cut o' his jib; but Mormons don't generally travel over Colorado in an outfit like his."

It took the team some time to reach the somewhat pretentious cabin dignified by the name of hotel at times.

As the wagon drew up alongside the building, the driver scrutinized it in silence.

In a little while a big, broad-shouldered man came out and, advancing to the wagon, scrutinized the Mormon with some show of surprise.

"Are you Mr. Durg?" asked the Saint on the seat.

"Not Mister Durg, but just Durg," was the response. "What is it, sir?"

"We'd like to get shelter if you keep hotel."

"We?" echoed the Colorado landlord, leaning forward to see who was included in the expression.

"Me and my wife, sir," added the Mormon, and, as he spoke, the man who had guided him to Durg's place uttered an exclamation, for he had just made the discovery that the wagon had more than one occupant.

"We haven't got very good accommodations for a lady," answered Colorado Durg. "To tell the truth, mister, we don't often have to lodge them."

"That is doubtless true, but your accommodations will be good enough for us."

"Get out, then."

The Mormon leaned back and said something in low tones to his companion, then he threw the lines forward over the animals' backs and began to stretch his figure on the outside of the vehicle.

By this time the unique outfit had attracted some attention, and half a dozen men were watching it with undisguised curiosity.

They were all stalwart fellows, in rough shirts and with dark skins—a set of men for which Bumblebee City was famous far beyond its prescribed limits.

There were several facetious remarks at the Mormon's expense as he aired himself on the ground, but when the young girl appeared the merriment grew still, and the looks of the crowd became stares of amazement.

The figure of the Mormon's wife was *petite*, and exceedingly graceful.

As she alighted she threw a look toward the hotel, and at the same time took in the bronzed

group revealed by the light that flooded the whole front of Durg's establishment.

The miners stepped aside when the passengers of the wagon approached the house, and not a word was spoken till they had passed beyond the threshold.

"I know that man!" suddenly broke forth one of the men as he turned to his companions, who, with himself, had studied the Mormons closely.

"So do I now," answered another voice, and the fellow who had conducted the Saint to the hotel stepped forward.

"Wal, who do you say he is, Chispa?"

"That man is Paul Phillips, the exiled Mormon priest."

One of the men nodded and confirmed the miner's words.

"What brings him hyer?" put in several voices at once.

"He's running away from the Secret Executions of the Saints," was the reply.

"Then, by the eternal, Bumble doesn't want ter shelter him!" cried the Chispa Chick. "In the first place, a hawk like Mormon Paul has no business with the dove he has in his clutches. The Mormon Church will stand nearly anything, but the conduct o' that Saint war too much for her. Three months ago the secret session tried him and found him guilty. A decree of eternal exile war passed, but, when the council came to execute it, Paul warn't ter be found. Then, if I've been rightly informed, the church passed another decree that'll cost the Saint his life if he is ever caught. Whar has he been these three months? I don't know."

Meanwhile, Mormon Paul, as the miners called him, had been shown to a small and poorly furnished room in the hotel.

No sooner had he shut the door than he walked to the window and looked out.

His companion with a look at him threw herself upon a chair and buried her face in her hands.

The Mormon remained some time at the window, from which he could see the dark figures of the men below. A scowl passed over his face, and when the group broke up, as it did suddenly, the men moving off in different directions, he wheeled suddenly upon the girl and found her in an attitude of grief in the chair.

"Here, none of this!" he grated, springing forward and clutching his companion's shoulder with a severity that drew from her a sharp, sudden cry of pain. "I've told you before, Hazel, that I will have no display of childishness in my presence."

The girl looked up into the Mormon's face, and as she tore herself from his grip, her face till that moment pale, flushed crimson.

"You know that I am not legally your wife!" she exclaimed, her eyes losing their soft expression for one calculated to alarm the Saint. "I repudiate the ceremony you caused to be performed. I loathe the doctrines of the Mormon Church. I abhor the slavery of its women, the—"

"Hush!" thundered the Mormon. "You want to keep a still tongue in your head. It will wag to your destruction if you persist in talking. Remember that where I go, you go, and that all the powers of earth cannot prevent you from being a Mormon wife."

The girl seemed to recoil from the looks and voice of the Saint, and the next moment she sat silent before him like a person stricken dumb.

Mormon Paul looked steadily at her a few seconds and then turned slowly and left her alone.

"She flashes up like powder now and then, but it doesn't last long," he said to himself on the narrow stair whose few steps led to the bar-room below. "What I told her is as true as gospel. No human power can take her from Mormon Paul!"

A minute later the well-built figure of the Mormon leaned against the rude counter of Colorado Durg's bar, and his oily hands were lifting a glass of liquor to his lips.

His somewhat battered plug hat was set back on his head, and his whole appearance caused him to resemble a roysterer more than a late pillar of the Mormon tabernacle.

"Hello, Paul!" suddenly called out a voice behind the Mormon, and with the liquor untasted though the glass was at his mouth he whirled toward the open door.

There he saw the giant figure of Chispa Chick. It almost filled the cramped doorway, and the greeting seemed to linger on the miner's lips.

Mormon Paul frowned a reception, and quietly set down his glass.

"I guess I haven't missed the nail's head," continued the miner, and then he came forward while half a dozen other faces appeared in the door.

"You've missed it squarely," replied the Mormon, with a faint attempt at merriment in the shape of a smile, "I don't know any one named Paul."

"Not Paul Phillips even—late a pillar in the Church o' the Saints?" grinned Chispa Chick. "I'm not the only galoot in Bumble who thinks he has a grip on ye. Thar's more ov 'em yonder," and the miner pointed over his shoulder at the group wedging itself into the door.

"I repeat that I don't know Paul Phillips," persisted the Mormon, looking at the crowd beyond the man from Chispa. "I am Felix Filbert, a quiet citizen, who is taking his wife overland to Denver."

Several broad grins were seen at the entrance, but Chispa Chick's face remained impassive.

"Your wife, eh?" echoed the chick. "A Mormon wife, may I ask? See hyer. When the Mormon council issued a decree of banishment ag'in' Paul Phillips, it annulled his marriages."

"It isn't true!" cried the Mormon, and then colored when he saw that, in an unguarded moment, he had acknowledged his identity.

The men laughed again.

"I guess we'll interfere, Mormon Paul," spoke Chispa Chick. "You can't keep any wives in Bumblebee City, and, besides, if half what we hear is true, we're in duty bound ter turn you over ter ther Executioners of ther Mormon church."

These words fell like a knell of doom on the Mormon's ears.

Had he reached shelter for this?

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING OUT OF IT.

THE men who stood at Chispa's back looked willing enough to do anything, and Mormon Paul, seeing this, was not placed at his ease.

He had proclaimed himself Felix Filbert, a name which he happened to know was entirely strange in those parts, but call himself what he would, he could not disguise himself beyond the possibility of detection. In other words, he looked and talked like a Mormon.

"We'll let the girl talk; we'll interview Mrs. Filbert," suddenly said Chispa Chick. "Bumblebee City ain't no exclusive place, but we don't want Mormons hyer. Thar ar' men among us who associate the hated name o' Mormon with Mountain Meadows; we hate the Church an' its people. If you ar' not Mormon Paul, you're created in his likeness, an' we want ter settle the business now."

"Call down the girl," spoke some one in the crowd, and as the sport from Chispa threw a glance toward the stair, Mormon Paul stepped forward.

"Mrs. Filbert has retired," he exclaimed, a defiant light flashing up in his eyes.

"We'll give her time ter come down in costume," was the prompt response.

The Mormon priest took another step and landed in front of the door.

"Gentlemen, whatever you do, don't inflict any indignity on a lady," said he. "If you don't want us in Bumble, we can go on, even though the journey will deprive us of needed rest. As to my being Mormon Paul, there isn't a Saint across the line who would confirm your charges. Landlord, if you will see to our team, we will resume the journey."

"Not just yet," sung out several voices.

"Yes, we want the question settled," resumed Chispa Chick.

At that moment the figure of a new man appeared in the open door.

A new man he was, indeed, for those who saw him knew at once that he was not and never had been a citizen of Bumblebee City.

The miners looked at one another and thought it strange that he should appear upon the scene at that moment.

Was he an ally of the Mormon's, and had he come to take the Saint's part?

Those who glanced at Mormon Paul saw, or thought they did, a shadow of fear cross his countenance. He and the stranger were not friends. It was doubtful whether they had ever met before.

The man in the door was no longer young, though he could not have passed his fortieth year.

A well-built figure was his, a rounded face covered with a dark-brown beard, and eyes that were piercing as signal lights.

"Good-night, gentlemen," said he. "I'm in your city for the first time. Have I found Durg's Hotel?"

"This is Durg's," answered that individual who leaned on the counter.

"Well, I'm glad o' that. My horse outside is as well blown as his master. You have shelter for beast as well as for man, I presume? They told me so over in Sardine."

The speaker walked to the counter and turned on the crowd as he leaned one arm upon it.

"Will you walk up, gentlemen, and wet your throats with Don Domingo, lately from Taos and the South?" he went on, waving his hand towards Durg's shelves.

There was a forward movement at once, and in the cordial invitation the pards of Bumblebee City seemed to forget that such a man as Mormon Paul existed.

"Hello! whar's the Mormon?" cried some one a moment later.

There was a quick turning on the part of the crowd, and then some expressions of chagrin, if not rage.

The man from Utah was gone! He had vanished as completely as though he had dis-

solved into thin air, and not one in the crowd was prepared to say whether he had gone upstairs, or through the open door to the street.

"What! had you a Mormon here?" asked Don Domingo, looking at the puzzled men.

"We think we had," answered Chispa Chick. "We war pinning him down pretty close when you dropped in. I guess we had him in a trap."

"Was he alone?"

"Wal, hardly. He's got a deucedly lovely wife up-stairs—a girl barely twenty."

"Did he deny being a pillar in the church?"

"Of course. We know him, though."

"Oh! He's come this way before?"

"Not that, cap'n. All of us haven't passed our lives in Bumblebee City. We've been rollin' stones over ther whole West, an' I for one have rolled over the length and breadth o' Mormondom with my eyes open and my finger close to the trigger, for I took my Gentile mouth along."

The man who spoke thus was Chispa, probably the handsomest as well as the squarest pard in Bumble.

"Who was the fellow? I mean what did you call him?" asked the new arrival.

"We dubbed him Mormon Paul, an exiled priest."

"Exiled, eh?"

"Yes, exiled and hunted by the church."

"For what?"

"That is one of the church's secrets. We know that Mormon Paul has been deposed from the Mormon priesthood, and that the church has set a price on his head."

"When did this occur?"

"The deposition, cap'n?"

"Yes."

"Three months ago."

"How long has he been a priest in the church?"

"About five years, though he's been a Mormon longer than that."

"What did he call himself to-night?"

"Felix Filbert, but he has no more right to that name than I have to the crown o' England."

Chispa Chick and some of his companions grinned.

"Did he go out to harness up his team?" continued Don Domingo.

"I don't know."

"He may have gone back to his wife."

The crowd looked toward the stair door in plain view, but no one went forward.

At that very moment the figure of the man so much talked about occupied a place on the narrow steps and his ear was pressed against the door where he was listening to the conversation in the bar-room.

There was an anxious expression on his face, and while he listened he held gripped in his left hand a formidable pattern of the six-shooter.

"What does he want to know so much for?" he hissed. "He comes to Bumble right on my heels, and forthwith plies the crowd with questions about me. He's no apostle of the church. I looked him over well, and saw no Mormon about him. Don Domingo from Taos and the South, eh? I've been there but it was years ago, but I never saw him in those parts. I see! I've fallen into a lion's trap with my prize. I must get out as speedily and as secretly as possible."

Mormon Paul, or Felix Filbert, as the reader pleases, had escaped by the stair door at a time when, for a moment, the arrival of the stranger had taken every eye from him.

He had not gone back to the young creature he had left up-stairs, but had halted on the steps to listen to Don Domingo and the pards of Bumblebee.

When he turned and crept noiselessly up the steps, he had the expression of a hunted man.

The next moment he opened a door and walked into a room whose only light was a quantity of moonshine and starlight that came in at the window.

In perhaps the only arm-chair in Bumble sat the beautiful companion who had been his fellow-passenger in the dilapidated wagon.

She was fast asleep, and without disturbing her, Mormon Paul walked to her side, and with a smile of triumph contemplated her fresh young beauty.

He stood over her for several seconds before he ventured to rouse her, then he raised his hand and touched her lightly.

Hazel started at the touch, for her sleep was light, and her face seemed to grow pallid when she found the Mormon bending over her.

"We're going off," said Mormon Paul.

"So soon?" cried the girl, starting. "I thought we were to rest here?"

"No; we move on," and the man shook his head as he spoke.

"What has happened?"

It was the most natural question in the world. "Never mind. This is no time to question good policy," was the response. "Are you ready to go?"

"Is the team ready?"

"We don't have to look after the team," growled Mormon Paul. "How far is it down to the ground from that window?"

The room occupied by the Mormon and his

companion was a front corner one, and besides the window that looked out upon the street before the house, it had another at the end.

It was this last window designated by the exiled Saint.

Hazel did not know.

Mormon Paul walked across the room and raised the sash. A glance seemed to satisfy him for he turned to the girl with a slight smile at his lips.

"It wouldn't kill any one to jump down there," said he, and then he quickly followed up his words with: "We won't jump, though."

In a little while the man had made a rope out of some of the covering of the bed in one corner of the room. During his work the girl watched him without a word, like a lamb regards the preparations for its death.

When the cord was completed, Mormon Paul lowered it from the window, but left one end secured to a strong pin in the frame.

"I'll go down first, and remember that you follow me!" he exclaimed, winding his fingers about Hazel's wrist as he spoke. "It is for the welfare of both of us to get away from here to-night. I did not discover that we had entered a tiger's den till a while ago. The men down there want the blood of both of us. From the way they talk, I think they'd rather have yours."

"In Heaven's name, why?" asked the girl.

"Time will show, but we must get away. I will test the rope with my weight; then you will come down."

The look of the young creature was answer enough, and the Mormon forced his body through the small window, and began to descend.

Three minutes afterward the girl followed his example, and then the loose end of the rope was bunched and thrown back into the chamber.

"Come," whispered Mormon Paul, taking Hazel's hand, and leading her toward the rear of the hotel where the shelter shed was. "One march has been stolen on the tigers; we want to complete the job."

Success seemed to smile on the Mormon's venture.

The couple passed the wagon that had brought them to Bumblebee City, and the hunted Saint left the girl long enough to secure the mules.

Then two saddles were fished from the depths of the wagon, and the couple were quickly mounted.

"They take me for a chick," laughed the Mormon, looking toward Durg's place. "If one or all follow, they'll discover that I'm a compound of Satan and Mephistopheles!"

"Not so fast thar, pard," sung out a voice, and the next second both Hazel and the Mormon saw the figure of a man in their path.

"We thought mebbe you'd try a sneak game, or at least I did," continued the lion in the way. "Jes' get down off the mule, an' let Bumble see more of you."

Mormon Paul growled out something the girl did not understand, then he threw one leg over the saddle and dropped to the ground.

"Here I am," he said to the man, and all at once Hazel saw him leap straight at the Colorado pard.

There was a sudden but noiseless collision, and while the startled girl held her breath, she saw the two men go to the ground, the Mormon on top.

A short, fierce tussle followed, when Mormon Paul got up and vaulted once more into the saddle.

CHAPTER V.

HOLDING OFF THE DOGS.

"A CLEAN, quick job!" commented Mormon Paul in undertones as he and Hazel rode past the figure lying on the ground where the brief struggle had taken place.

The girl looked down at the man but said nothing.

She wanted to know why the pard of Bumblebee City had watched for Paul, and what had given cause for the sudden flight, but she kept silence.

In a little while the lights of the camp disappeared and the couple found themselves riding toward the lofty chain of mountains that towered above the city like battlements.

"They will soon miss us if they look around," thought the girl. "I know that the Coloradans don't like Mormons, and this is why we are flying for our lives. They may follow us, for the trail must be plain. They will find the man left dead in the road behind the hotel. That will whet their weapons for vengeance. We can't escape. We will be overtaken by the men of the mountains, and their hatred of everything Mormon will not let them spare me because I am of gentle blood."

Hazel's prediction that Bumblebee City would soon discover their absence turned out to be a true one.

The man—the new arrival—who called himself Don Domingo took such an interest in Mormon Paul, that the pards resolved to make him face the music again.

It was their intention to order the couple into

the bar-room where they proposed to prove by Hazel that her escort was not Felix Filbert, but the exiled priest of Mormonism.

Chispa Chick volunteered to go up-stairs and announce the decision. He mounted the flight and opened the door to find the room empty.

More than this. He was greeted by an open window, and then discovered the improvised rope which had been left behind.

In an instant the whole thing dawned on Chispa's mind.

"The Utah fox stole a march on us!" he growled. "This is what we get for letting a man like Don Domingo help the game out of the trap."

Chispa Chick tramped sullenly back to his comrades and delivered the unwelcome report.

A moment's silence followed the news; then the crowd broke out into threats of the direct sort. There was a rush for the door and the mad miners ran to the shelter sheds to find the mules gone and a dead man stretched at full length on the ground.

When the victim was recognized as a comrade another howl of rage went forth, and the pards of Bumblebee exhibited the excitement of tigers unexpectedly robbed of their prey.

Don Domingo saw more than one suspicious look directed at him.

He had come on the ground in the nick of time for the Mormon priest. If he had been delayed a few moments, the men of the Colorado camp would have had the Saint in their grip, and nothing could have intervened to save his neck.

The corpse of the self-constituted spy was carried into Durg's Hotel where it was placed on the floor of the bar-room.

Some one threw a dirty handkerchief over the face after it had been ascertained that the man had been choked to death by fingers which had sunk into the flesh.

Don Domingo took no part in these proceedings.

He leaned against the counter and let Chispa Chick and his companions have their own way.

The inquest did not take up much time, and the resolve to follow the Mormons at once and to the bitter end was the natural result of the affair.

There was not at that time a horse in camp excepting the one lately ridden by Don Domingo, and the men said to themselves that he would not lead the chase after Mormon Paul.

However, it was decided to take the trail without horses.

The Mormon would not be likely to take the back track, as he had been exiled from the lands of the church. It was expected that he would plunge at once into the heart of the Silver Hills, hoping, perhaps, to find asylum there until the hunt was over.

Chispa Chick withdrew from the crowd at the hotel and went quietly to his cabin to prepare for the pursuit.

As he opened the door and stepped inside he heard a footfall behind.

He did not turn until he had struck a lucifer across one of the logs, and when the little flame flared up he looked into the face of Don Domingo.

For a moment the two men stood face to face without a word.

"Come in," said Chispa at length, and the new arrival obeyed, closing the door behind him.

"Touch the match to your lamp first," began Don Domingo who saw that the little stick was burning down to the miner's fingers.

"So I will," and the Chick, as Chispa was sometimes called, lit a lamp that stood on his roughly-fashioned table.

"You are determined to follow the Mormon?" spoke Don Domingo as he dropped upon a three-legged stool as coolly as if he were about to discuss a meal.

Chispa frowned.

"Is this to give them time?" passed through his mind. "They're making for the hills with all their energy while this fellow, who pretends that he doesn't like even a Mormon's shadow, holds me back."

Then he answered Don Domingo.

"Yes, we intend ter foller. We can't be held back any longer. If the rascal wasn't a Mormon the death o' Santa Cruz Dick at the sheds would be enough; but, he's a pillar in the church and that's worse still."

"An exiled pillar you have said."

"Yes, if perciseness suits you better," petulantly answered Chispa.

Don Domingo noted the miner's spirit and smiled.

"I don't see how the couple can get away," said he.

"They can't if we are swift, but, great Caesar! the mountains are full of hiding-places."

"They would starve if they found them."

"We don't want 'em to do that!" cried Chispa Chick. "That wouldn't be any vengeance for us. Hang a Mormon anyhow!" and the Colorado sport struck the table with his fist till the lamp was nearly overturned.

"Will you hear me a moment?" asked Don Domingo.

The Chick, who was buckling a belt of revolvers about his ample waist, looked at his visitor in surprise.

"Only one, cap'n?" he exclaimed.

"I'll try not to make it much more."

"Then, go on."

Don Domingo dived one hand beneath his coat and produced a small book like a diary, which he consulted a second before he spoke again.

"You said awhile ago that the man you call Mormon Paul became a Mormon priest five years since," he proceeded, glancing up at Chispa.

"That is true."

"You also said that he was a Mormon long before that event."

"Yes."

"How long?"

Chispa Chick slowly shook his head.

"Have you nothing to go by?" persisted Don Domingo.

"Yes, I have!" was the sudden response. "I was in Salt Lake City the time that man espoused the Mormon faith. By jingo! it all comes back to me now."

"Was he Paul somebody, then?"

"I don't think he was."

The Chick, who had ceased to pay attention to his arming, reflected soberly while Don Domingo watched him with intense curiosity, mingled with anxiety.

"That man wasn't called Paul, then," he exclaimed, taking an eager step toward his visitor, whose eyes got an expression of triumph.

"He took it after he joined the Mormons. I've got his name now. It has come back to me like a flash of light."

"What is it?"

"That Mormon dog was then Juan Ortiz."

Don Domingo started slightly and gave the Chick a faint smile.

"That sounds Spanish," said he. "I don't see anything Spanish in Mormon Paul's looks."

"Neither do I, and, if you will let me tell the truth, I don't see anything about you that confirms your Spanish-Mexican name, Don Domingo."

"Well, Maybe I am no more Don Domingo than Mormon Paul was really Juan Ortiz," was the answer. "You are certain that was his name, Chispa?"

"I am."

"How long had he been among the Saints before he joined them?"

"I heard the people say about six months."

"You never saw him after he became priest?"

"Not until to-night."

Chispa Chick went back to the belt and its weapons again.

"The Mormon has a good start now," observed Don Domingo.

In a twinkling the miner's eyes were fixed upon him.

"Have you played me for this?" he cried, and his countenance darkened. "Have you pumped me in order to give them a good start?"

"Not at all," quietly responded Don Domingo.

"I am interested in the Mormon, though."

"I would think so, from what I've seen and heard," said Chispa, caustically. "I hardly think you want us to catch the pair."

"I would rather catch them myself."

The Chick gave Don Domingo a most singular look—one full of curiosity and amazement.

"By Jupiter! I don't understand this!" he said. "Did you know that Mormon Paul war in Bumblebee when you struck it?"

"I did not."

"Nor that he had been exiled from the tabernacle of the Saints?"

"I had heard a breath, merely a breath—of it."

"Are you on that man's trail?"

The question came out so bluntly and unexpectedly that Don Domingo looked wonder-struck.

"No, I am not looking for Mormon Paul," said he, recovering in a moment, and Chispa Chick noticed that the name was slightly emphasized. "If the fellow was shrewd enough to escape from the swords of the Saints, he is likely to give you a long chase."

"We don't intend to turn back without them."

"Oh, you want them both, do you?"

"Yes, the Mormon and his wife!" replied the Chick, sternly. "When we first saw the couple we thought that the girl might be an unwilling victim; but it looks the other way now. She didn't have ter fly with Mormon Paul; only one person could go down the rope at a time. I tell you, Don Domingo, the leopardess is as guilty as her lord. And a Mormon angel ain't any better than a Rocky Mountain siren."

"Then, you won't discriminate?"

"I guess not!" grated Chispa Chick. "They didn't show any mercy at the Meadows; why should we? Now, you don't hold me byer any longer. You kin stay in Bumble till we come back with the fugitives, or you kin go along. The result will be the same in either case. Mormon blood must pay for the life that was choked off to-night!"

The following moment the cabin door was thrown aside, and Don Domingo saw the stal-

wart figure of Chispa Chick, equipped for the hunt, vanish in the night.

"I held the dogs off a little while," he laughed.

CHAPTER VI.

ROMEO.

FOR a short time Don Domingo remained in the cabin.

When he took his departure he sauntered toward Durg's Hotel only to discover that the dogs of vengeance were loose on the trail.

"They've got a fox to deal with," remarked the landlord with a curious twinkle in his eye. "I know these Saints like a book, but Mormon Paul had escaped me entirely. When I lived in Utah I war on terms with the most o' the apostles. They all look alike to me from Brigham down; but Chispa knew this one, and some o' the others confirmed his suspicions."

"When did you live in Utah?" queried Don Domingo.

"Ten years ago."

"In Salt Lake?"

"No, but I war thar pretty often."

"Did you ever hear of Juan Ortiz?"

Durg of Bumblebee City shook his head.

"I did not know Juan," said he.

"Then, you cannot tell me anything about Mormon Paul before he joined the Saints?"

"I cannot."

Don Domingo was shut off from continuing the conversation by the entrance of a queer-looking man, who would have attracted attention anywhere.

He was barely five feet tall, though his figure was not dwarfish, his limbs being perfect and his carriage graceful for a person of his size.

The eyes set deeply in his head, were black and restless, and the raven hair, which was long and glossy, he kept smoothed back, so that it fell over his shoulders.

Durg saluted this person with a peculiar exclamation, and when the little man stood alongside the counter, his chin barely touched its level.

The landlord called him Romeo, and at the first mention of the name a smile appeared at Don Domingo's lips, as if he wondered whether the stranger possessed a Juliet.

Romeo bowed to Don Domingo when Durg, with a gesture, introduced the pair, and the little man stepped back and looked closely at Bumblebee's visitor.

"I've seen you before, ha, ha!" laughed Romeo, much to Don Domingo's surprise. "You've changed a little, got a trifle heavier, as though you've been living well. Haven't been through here since, I presume?"

"Since when?" came from Don Domingo, without the slightest effort; but Romeo chuckled mischievously, and looked mysteriously at Durg. "I never forget people," the little man went on, after a brief pause, which only increased Don Domingo's curiosity. "I don't think you succeeded that time."

"You puzzle me," exclaimed the astonished man. "I have never been in Bumblebee City before to-night—"

"Of course not; there was no Bumble then."

"I don't understand you."

Romeo grinned again and showed his teeth.

"I came in too late for the drama, I hear," he continued, turning to Durg. "Red Robin gave me the outlines in a few words. A Mormon exile and his wife, hey? Why didn't you hold 'em when you had 'em in your fist?"

"They got away; that's all," answered the landlord. "A Mormon for cuteness, and a fox, too."

"I wish I had come sooner," replied Romeo with a sigh of regret. "I like Mormons, you know," and he laughed derisively as his glance wandered from the landlord to Don Domingo.

All at once Romeo walked out, leaving the door open behind him.

"He's a queer one," remarked Durg, looking across the counter at Don Domingo, whose eyes confirmed the opinion. "He lives in the mountains like a hermit, but drops in on us occasionally when nobody looks for him."

The landlord's auditor looked toward the door, and saw just beyond the threshold the figure which had lately passed it.

Romeo seemed to be waiting for him, and, a moment later, Don Domingo stood before the little hermit.

"Come with me," spoke Romeo, walking off without further ceremony, and the other followed, with his curiosity again on the rise.

The mountain sport led Don Domingo to a cabin which stood at one end of the camp. He opened the door and entered, then found matches and a tin lamp with as much ease as though the shanty was his own quarters, and when he had dissipated the darkness he wheeled upon his companion and clutched his sleeve.

"You are Monsieur Ledocq, the American Shadow of the French police!" crossed his lips. "I did not like to give you away before Durg, for fear you would not like it. I have heard since you were in this country after your man that you had settled down to a quiet life in New York. Is it true?"

A singular change had come over Don Do-

mingo. His astonishment on hearing words like these from Romeo rather substantiated the charge, but in a second he was himself again.

"You know a good deal for a mountain hermit," he answered, with a smile.

"I know more than they think I do. You have forgotten me."

"I never saw you before to-night."

Romeo laughed lightly and stepped into the full blaze of the light as he showed off his figure to the best advantage.

"Look me over from head to foot," said he. "You men shadowers are as sharp-eyed as minks, and you have good memories. A little thought ought to place me before you."

Don Domingo made a study of the little figure posed before him.

He saw the black eyes shining like polished coals, and noticed that Romeo was eager to reveal himself.

"Take off your cap," commanded Don Domingo.

In a moment Romeo stood bareheaded before him, and all at once he leaned toward the little man with a cry.

"I see it now!" he exclaimed. "You are the fellow I was going to punish for taking the linch-pins from my wagon years ago near where Denver now stands."

"Do you think so?" laughed Romeo, and then his face assumed an expression of mock gravity. "Do I look like a person who would serve any one a trick of that sort?"

"You did it, though."

"Then you are Monsieur Ledocq?"

"What if I am?" answered Don Domingo.

"I ought to pay you yet for the linch-pin trick." "Did it help you to lose the prize you were after then?"

"It did. Who paid you for that job?"

"No one."

"What did you do it for?"

"I didn't have a very good opinion of detectives then."

"Have you changed your mind since?"

"Somewhat."

"I lost my man then," continued Don Domingo. "I had followed him from Paris, across the ocean, and almost through the continent. I was on his trail when I appeared in Colorado, and but for several accidents, among them the loss of my linch-pins, I would have caged my tiger."

"I did not think it was quite that bad," said Romeo. "It is too late now to restore the linch pins, but I apologize most heartily. I would like to ask whether you are after the man you then lost?"

"I'm on a trail, but I cannot tell you where it will end."

"Was the man who brought you to Colorado from Paris entirely lost?"

"I never found the trail after the night when you interfered?"

"No?" and Romeo reflected a few seconds.

"Well, that man vanished from me as completely as he did from you," he went on presently. "I wanted to find him for a purpose, but, when I tried to I discovered nothing but a lot of freshly-picked human bones."

"Where did you find them?"

"In the heart of Skeleton Valley not far from Denver."

"Do you think they were his?"

"I used to think so; indeed, I hugged that idea a long time, or, until I lost it in Mormonism."

"How so?"

"One day on the streets of Salt Lake, the City of the Saints, I ran against the hunted man's ghost. I nearly dropped at the shock, and when I recovered the man was gone. I never saw him again."

"Did you watch for him?"

Romeo laughed.

"I should think I did! I haunted the Mormon paradise for three weeks. I was as near everywhere at once during that time as a human being could be. My ghost did not show up in any shape, but some one played against me a cool hand."

"What was that?"

"One night I was caught and blindfolded. Two men who wore masks did the job. I was taken beyond the limits of Salt Lake City, and made to take a terrible oath that I would never again go back. If I had refused to take the oath, I would have been daggered by the Mormons. The hand of my ghost was in that. Don't you think so, Don?"

"Undoubtedly," was the reply.

"I didn't go away empty-handed, though," exclaimed Romeo. "I discovered the name of the man I had recognized on the street. It was Juan Ortiz."

Don Domingo gave a slight start.

"Did he belong to the Mormons?"

"Yes."

"As Juan Ortiz?"

"No; he took another name when he went into the church, but I cannot recollect it. I think they made him a priest. A nice priest, truly, if he was the man you followed across the sea, and nearly through this big continent of ours."

"Do you think the man I lost in Colorado

years ago and the Mormon you ran across in Utah, are identical?"

"I do," answered Romeo, promptly. "I never expected to see you back here, and I can't say that I wanted to, for I knew you would never forget the trick of the linch-pins, which, apparently trifling in its nature, worked such startling results. But, since you are here, I'm willing to help you all I can. While you are on a new trail, you are anxious to solve the mystery that hangs over the man who gave you the slip a long time ago."

"I am!" cried Don Domingo.

Romeo stepped closer to the man sleuth and lowered his voice.

"Would you mind telling me why you chased him across the ocean? What did he do in Paris?"

Don Domingo, who is, as the reader has doubtless suspected ere this, the Richard Redfire of our first chapter, gave Romeo a searching look before he replied.

"Must you know?" he asked, another smile appearing at his mouth.

"I would like to."

"He committed a grave crime over there. I was to have fifty thousand francs for catching him."

"Oho! Does the reward still stand?"

"No; it has been withdrawn under the belief that the man is dead."

"If you were to find him now, what?"

"I would not get a sou."

"But still you want him?"

"Yes!" cried Don Domingo eagerly. "I want him to tell me something. I would trail him over a dozen continents like this."

"I like your pluck!" declared the little man.

"If you want Juan Ortiz, I don't see why you are looking for him in these parts. I left him among the Mormons in Salt Lake City. He is there to-night, no doubt—a pillar in the church, and a devil among the Saints."

"Are you sure of this, Romeo?" queried the detective.

"Why not? Nobody would look for the Parisian criminal in the Mormon tabernacle."

"I would not for one, for he is not there."

Romeo uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I'm closer to him than you think, Romeo. We'll wait till Chispa Chick reports."

"Heavens!" cried Romeo as he recoiled. "Do you think you will find your old fox in Mormon Paul?"

The detective's eyes glittered.

"Wait and see," he smiled. "Yes, wait and see, Romeo."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORMON AND HIS PRIZE.

MEANTIME, Mormon Paul and his beautiful young companion were pushing as rapidly as possible from Bumblebee City.

"Do you think they will follow us?" ventured Hazel, after a long silence.

Her words seemed to rouse the exiled priest from a sort of lethargy.

"They'll not be likely to let us have it all our own way," was his reply as he looked at the girl whose graceful outlines were distinctly seen despite the gloominess of their surroundings.

"Perhaps if you had not fought the man at the sheds, they would not be hunting us now," she returned.

"Why did he play spy?" cried Mormon Paul. "Did he think I would walk back into the traps of the Gentiles at his command? A fool he was!" and the man laughed in a manner that kept the girl silent.

She tried to look ahead as they rode along, but the trail was too tortuous to let her see far in advance and she soon gave over the attempt.

"If they think I will blunder through this country, they will soon discover their mistake," suddenly continued Mormon Paul.

Hazel looked at him, but ventured neither comment nor question.

He evidently wanted her to speak, and seemed disappointed at her silence.

The trail, or the path, which could barely be seen, led up the mountain, and the girl gave Mormon Paul frequent glances of amazement for he turned abruptly to the right or to the left as if he had traversed the very ground before.

At last the animals, pretty well jaded, reached a little piece of table-land elevated far above Bumblebee City.

They were permitted to blow, and the Mormon looked back through the starlit night and downward toward the distant camp.

"I know all this country," said he to Hazel with a gesture intended to emphasize his words. "We aren't running into an unknown wilderness. I've tried all these trails, but it was some years ago."

"Before you became Mormon?" asked the girl.

In an instant the exiled priest leaned forward. "What made you ask that question?" he cried.

"Was it not natural? You have not been Mormon more than ten years by your own confession and I cannot believe that you were in this country within that time. This is Colorado."

"And these are the famous Silver Hills," was the response. "If the information does you any

good, know that I was here before I adopted the Mormon faith. We have been forced to fly from Bumblebee City. Do you know for why, Hazel?"

"You told me because the people back there hate every Mormon."

"They hate us like a snake hates fire."

"Us?"

"Yes; you are Mormon, too."

The young girl drew back from the eyes that seemed to burn her face.

"For the sake of Heaven, let me think for myself," she pleaded. "You know that I was never raised to believe in the doctrines of the Church. I was the child of Gentile parents, and, but for their foolish resolution made in an evil hour, I would not be hunted as a Mormon to-night."

"Maybe not," laughed Mormon Paul. "Would you go back yonder—back to the men-tigers of Bumblebee?"

Hazel looked down the darkened trail, shuddered and was silent.

"I know you would not!" exclaimed Mormon Paul. "You don't want to go back any more than I do, and I'm satisfied to be where I am. You are wedded for life to the faith I have espoused. Whatever you may think of the ceremony that has been performed, you are the wife of Mormon Paul till death parts us. Your fortunes are his fortunes, and, if the worst should come, his fate is yours."

"Is there no escape?" cried the girl.

"None!" answered the Mormon, coolly. "Our fortunes are united. Perhaps we blundered when we drove into Bumblebee City; but we know whom to avoid. We must go ahead."

"Always ahead. We dare not go back. The sentence of the church is against you."

"Let it stand!" he cried. "I shall never set foot again on Mormon soil."

"The Avenging Angels of the Saints will follow you beyond the territory."

"Let them follow! Three months have passed since the sentence, yet what have they done? They find the trail cold wherever they go. After all their tireless vigilance they have lost Mormon Paul as completely as though the earth had engulfed him."

The man laughed triumphantly at his own words, but the girl looked on without the semblance of a smile.

"You would risk the chances if I gave permission, wouldn't you?" he asked.

Her eyes spoke before her lips parted.

"I would try it," said she.

"I thought so. I can't make a Mormon out of you."

"Not while I live!"

Mormon Paul straightened in his saddle and watched her quietly for a moment.

"You don't want to give me trouble," said he, his voice sinking to a threatening whisper as it proceeded. "Were it not for you I would not be a Mormon exile to-night, hunted by the Executioners of the Faith, and by the men of Colorado. I thought you worth playing for, and I think so still. You can be a very queen one of these days if you will be tractable, and pleasant."

"If I will forget my mother and what she taught me!" cried the girl, her eyes glowing with sudden animation. "I fear I will never be tractable, as you say. My very soul revolts at the thought of being a Mormon's wife."

"I am exiled," smiled Paul. "You forget that the church has banished me."

"I forget nothing. The taint of the awful faith clings to you in spite of everything. Mormon Paul, you dare not let me go."

"Not for a world of riches!" was the quick response. "Were I to relinquish you, the hand of one higher among the Saints than I would be put forth to take you."

"My God! from one flame to another!" gasped the girl.

"From Mormon to Mormon! I guess you are safest where you are."

There was no reply to words like these, and in a little while the mules were once more picking their way over the serpentine trail.

One of Mormon Paul's hands kept a steady hold on Hazel's bridle, as if to leave it for a moment would be to lose her.

The two pursued their way unmolested.

More than once the girl dropped asleep, but the gait of the animals roused her as often, and the night passed in the saddle.

When day dawned again they were far from Bumblebee City.

The country was wild like that about the camp, and no signs of human life were visible.

The sun was illumining the landscape when Hazel gave a sudden start and glanced at Mormon Paul.

The mules had just entered a wild, picturesque gulch, whose perpendicular battlements of gray stone seemed to lose themselves in the leaden sky.

A few yards ahead stood a man roughly dressed in a mixture of buckskin and homespun.

He was a bronzed athlete, and looked a veritable giant in Hazel's eyes, which from the first became fixed upon him.

A statue of stone could not have been more immovable than the man in the canyon.

He was looking steadily at Mormon Paul and his companion, whom he had seen before they noticed him, and he was now waiting quietly for them to come up.

The exiled priest gave vent to a low exclamation when he saw the man, and Hazel saw his hand tighten on her bridle-rein.

The mules stopped seemingly of their own accord, but the check had been given by the Mormon himself.

At that moment the man seemed to become imbued with life, for he stepped from the rock against which he had leaned and threw up one hand.

"Come right ahead!" rung out his voice, clear and distinct. "I'm no lion, ready to devour you raw."

Mormon Paul hesitated.

"Don't want to get acquainted, eh?" continued the fellow, and the following moment he came down the canyon tramping heavily over the stones.

Hazel, the girl, watched him with deepening interest. She saw that he was not past thirty, that he had a clear black eye, a tanned face strikingly handsome, and a wealth of long hair which fell gracefully below his broad hat-brim.

Mormon Paul scowled at the man as he approached.

Here was an encounter not bargained for by the fugitive. He did not want to see any one for he had not yet passed the limits of the Silver Hills, the country of the pards of Bumblebee.

The stranger raised his hat to Hazel as he caught her expressive and wondering gaze, but he soon turned his attention to the exile.

"I am Solid Silver Dick," said he. "A fellow has to introduce himself on occasions of this kind. The camp is just at the end of the canyon—"

The start given by Mormon Paul when the nearness of the camp was mentioned broke the man's sentence, and Hazel saw him looking intently at the hunted apostle.

"We weren't looking for camps," Paul said.

"Mebbe not, but you'll find the Deuce-o'-Diamonds in your way if you keep on."

"Is that the camp?"

"Yes."

Mormon Paul appeared to reflect.

Suddenly a gleam of sunshine—a lucky thought, as it were—seemed to decide him.

"We'll go to the Deuce-o'-Diamonds," said he, throwing a look at the girl who was perfectly willing to proceed.

"How much of a camp have you?" he asked the man.

"It's no metropolis, though, if it is little, it is immense in more ways than one. The lady will make the boys open their eyes for they haven't seen an angel for so long, and some o' them have given up seeing one as long as they keep their boots on."

A slight flush suffused the girl's countenance at this roughly spoken compliment, and when Solid Dick placed himself at the head of the mules she saw the eyes of Mormon Paul fixed sternly upon him.

The man had spoken truly when he said that a camp existed at the end of the canyon.

When the animals emerged from the place their riders found themselves almost within the precincts of a cluster of cabins arranged with no particular regard to order.

Solid Silver Dick turned upon the couple with a pleasant look.

"Deuce-o'-Diamonds!" smiled he, with a welcoming gesture, and then he sent up a shout that opened half a dozen shanty doors as if by magic.

It was too late to go back now.

Mormon Paul gave the girl a glance which was both a command and a threat, and then put on an impassive look.

He found himself the next moment in the center of the grouped population of the little camp—more than thirty men, each as well built as Solid Dick.

Questions flew thick and fast. They were showered upon him from every side till Mormon Paul, under his breath, cursed the fates which had brought him and his beautiful companion to Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM WOLF TO TIGER.

As a matter of fact, the Mormon priest did not want to tarry in the mining-camp at the mouth of the canyon.

He did not know how soon he would be recognized in his true character, and to stop in his flight would lessen the distance between the men of Bumblebee and himself if they had taken to the trail.

He answered the questions showered upon him with a rogue's ingenuity. It stood him in need to do so.

Not once did he permit himself to lose temper. To have done this for a moment would have ruined his cause if nothing worse.

He was afraid all the time that he would be taken for a Mormon, and knowing Hazel's desire to escape from his clutches, he watched the girl like a hawk, and saw that she did not exchange words with the men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

When the flow of interrogatives ceased, Mormon Paul and his companion were invited to breakfast with a mess of five men, one of whom was Solid Silver Dick, who had appeared to them in the gulch.

The banished apostle would have refused this kindness, but a look at Hazel told him that the all-night flight had hungered her, and he submitted.

More than once he threw anxious glances toward the canyon. He did not know that Chispa Chick and his followers had no horses at their command. His stay in Bumblebee City had been so brief that he had not made any discoveries calculated to allay his fears at this time.

"They say I look somewhat like a Mormon," laughed Paul, as the meal progressed and his anxiety left him a little. "I hope you gentlemen don't think so. I don't like the tribe."

"Neither do we," was the response. "There's no feeling for the hounds in Deuce-o'-Diamonds. Some of us have had an experience with the Saints; but we don't like 'em anyhow."

A chill seemed to run along the Mormon's bones, and if he had noticed Hazel at that moment, he would have caught the semblance of a smile of hope at her lips.

A few feet from the breakfast party with his back against a tree stood a man with folded arms.

He looked like the rest of the miners inasmuch as he was stalwart and dark-faced.

His eyes were watching Mormon Paul with a zest that lent a twinkle to their depths.

The rest of the mess he did not appear to see at all.

The breakfast was over at last. It had lasted a long time in the Mormon's mind, but in reality it had not taken up many minutes.

Mormon Paul proposed to move on at once.

Hazel said nothing, but her downcast looks told the toughs of the camp that she was no very willing traveler with the man.

Solid Dick put in a remonstrance to the sudden departure. He looked several times at the girl while he spoke.

The exiled priest shook his head and rejected all invitations and proposals.

Not for the world would he have stayed in Deuce-o'-Diamonds for a day.

He took Hazel's hand and led her to the mules that waited for them.

They had half of the camp at their heels.

It was not hard to see that the Coloradans thought that the girl was not a voluntary companion. She had secretly enlisted the sympathies of every man in the camp.

Mormon Paul assisted Hazel to her seat in the saddle, but as he was about to mount himself he was touched from behind.

The touch sent a thrill through every nerve.

He whirled at once and looked into a face he did not remember to have seen before.

It was the face of the man who with folded arms had studied him at breakfast from the tree.

"Don't go off like powder," said the man, meeting the Mormon's astonished gaze with a calm look that meant no good. "I think I've seen you somewhere."

"I've been about a little," answered Paul with a forced smile.

"I am Lucky Luke, though for ten years the name's been a misnomer. I used to be Luke Livingstone, and in my time I've drifted over the whole west including Utah and the City o' the Saints."

"Well, what is it?"

"You are Felix Filbert, you say?" queried the miner.

"I am."

"You never had another name?"

"Never!"

Lucky Luke stepped back and looked from Mormon Paul to his anxious comrades.

"I had my mouth with me when I was in Salt Lake," he went on, coming back to the exile. "I was one of the loudest Gentiles there—a regular wolf among the lambs. I was there during the reign of the secret conclave which was formed by the Church to keep down just such fellows as I was. It spared no one against whom it issued one of its infernal decrees. More than one Gentile disappeared and never came back to solve the mystery that surrounded him. I guess I'm the only one who stood before that tribunal of Mormon villainy and afterward got off with my life."

Mormon Paul seemed to have expected a wind-up of this sort, for his lips became compressed a little more, and he looked steadily at Lucky Luke while he waited for him to go on.

"I had a time with the Tribunal," cried the miner. "In the secret chamber of the Mormon judges, which must have been under the tabernacle itself. I was tried in the most infamous manner. No! it was no trial at all. For the first time in my life I saw the members of the Tribunal face to face, and every one I photographed on my mind to remain there to my dying day."

"It is no matter here how I escaped death after receiving the awful sentence of that midnight court. I am the only man that ever came out of the ordeal alive, and I wouldn't pass

through it again for the wealth of a thousand Mormon churches. Now, gentlemen of Deuce-o'-Diamonds, I stand before you all and say that that man is the one who passed sentence on me in the secret court of the Mormon Tribunal."

The stalwart figure of the speaker towered like a colossal statue before Mormon Paul, and in the presence of the mountain camp his bronzed hand covered him like a revolver.

"Don't make any mistake, Lucky!" warned some one.

"Mistake? I wish it was a mistake! But the events of that night, half of which I have never told, carved the faces of my judges on my memory. That man may be Felix Filbert now, but then he was the chief man of the Tribunal, and beyond its portals he was Paul, the Mormon priest."

An electric bolt from a clear sky could not have astonished the crowd more than did this charge and revelation.

Well might Mormon Paul think that he had fled from wolf to tiger.

"What have you to say?" queried Solid Silver Dick to the apostle. "Lucky Luke makes a pretty bold statement. We would like to think, of course, that he has made a mistake for the lady's sake."

"Ask the girl herself!" exclaimed Livingstone.

"I am willing to submit to her answer. She knows something of the past of the man at her side. While she may not know that he was the chief judge of the Tribunal, she can say whether or not he was ever a priest in the Mormon Church."

"I am willing," answered Paul, clutching at the straw thus placed in his path. "My wife can answer you as she knows the truth—"

"Your wife?" laughed some one near the outside of the crowd. "She's a dandy witness if she's a Mormon's wife! I know these creatures—"

"Hush!" interrupted the voice of Luke. "I say I am willing to stand by the woman's testimony, and that ought to settle it. I'm the interested party in this matter. Let the woman, wife though she be, tell the truth before God and man!"

The face of the girl, nearly colorless before, was deathly pallid now.

Here was a chance to escape from the clutches of Mormon Paul. She had but to tell the truth to get beyond the slavery that held her in its iron grip.

But dared she do it?

When she looked up she caught the eyes of the Mormon exile.

They spoke more than tongue could articulate; they said to her as plainly as language could have spoken.

"Tell the truth and die for your temerity!"

It seemed to be the turning point in Hazel's life.

"Tell them," said Mormon Paul with the same look he had just bestowed. "You know that no act of mine—"

"Don't influence the witness!" rung out a coarse voice that made the Mormon flush. "We want the woman to speak what she knows. Now, Luke, put your question."

Luke Livingstone stepped in front of the girl, and addressed her.

"Speak the truth and fear no evil!" said he. "Is the man yonder Paul the Mormon, or has he ever held a position in the Church of the Saints?"

Hazel felt the influence of the eyes she did not see at that moment.

She knew that the burning look of Mormon Paul was riveted upon her.

"Answer them!" spoke the exiled apostle.

The girl took a step toward Lucky Luke; the miner put out a hand to meet her.

"Don't touch that woman without my consent!" roared Mormon Paul. "She is my wife, and I have all legal rights to her till death parts us."

At that moment the girl turned with a quickness that startled every one.

The voice of the Mormon seemed to have given her the very strength she needed.

"I will tell the truth," cried she as her hand went up till it covered the white-faced wretch before her. "Though I am called that man's wife, I repudiate the infamous ceremony that made me such. Yes, he has been a priest of the Mormon tabernacle, but now he is a banished Saint—Paul, the hunted exile of the hated faith!"

The flash that leaped up in the Mormon's eyes made three men throw their massive figures between him and Hazel.

"What do you say?" queried the voice of Luke.

"It is a lie as black as a thunder-cloud!" was the quick response.

"You have never been an apostle, eh?"

"No, and nobody knows it better than the girl yonder."

"Your wife?"

"My wife!"

The next moment the hands of Hazel parted the men who had planted themselves in her front.

"Not a Mormon, does he say?" she exclaimed, a derisive smile at the lips which held some color

once more. "Open his coat and see on his breast the sign of some secret order of the Church. He carries a mark for life—a tattoo which, to the knowing, would condemn him as a Mormon in any land under the sun!"

Mormon Paul retreated to the side of the mule he had ridden into camp.

"My person is sacred to me, gentlemen," said he coolly, but with emphasis. "The Jezebel I have been trying to get shut of so long shall not lie me to destruction. You have gone far enough. Whether I am Mormon Paul or not in your minds, I intend to show a hand myself," and the crowd who heard this language saw a cocked six-shooter dart upward in the Mormon's grip.

CHAPTER IX.

OVERTAKEN.

TAKEN aback by this sudden display of armed resistance on the Mormon's part, the men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds looked from one another into Paul's face.

No change had come over the priest's face.

The same oily smile was seen at the corners of the mouth, and his eyes had the same deceptive light of a few moments before.

For all this, it took no study for the mountain pards to see that there was "fight" in the man they had cornered.

Hazel awaited the result with bated breath.

She had smiled slightly over the epithet Mormon Paul had bestowed upon her, and she wondered whether his declaration that he had wanted to get shut of her had been taken for the truth by the assembled toughs.

A muttered consultation ran through the crowd before a reply was returned to Mormon Paul's words.

"If you're going, get out o' camp almighty quick!" suddenly exclaimed Solid Dick.

"We'll keep the wife you've been wantin' ter lose so long," said another.

"Yes, go," growled Lucky Livingstone. "If you'll make yourself scarce, I'll try to forget the judgment you passed on me in the chamber of the Tribunal. Take both mules if you want 'em. We can't afford to feed any critters of the kind."

Mormon Paul heard this with secret satisfaction.

He knew that Hazel would not be given up by the men whose sympathies she had enlisted, and he considered himself lucky to get off as easily as he was doing.

He looked once more at the girl as he lowered the revolver and grasped the bridle of his mule. It was a look which told a good deal, but nothing about final relinquishment.

The Mormon priest turned his back upon the pards of the camp with a good deal of confidence in their honesty.

He led both mules away, himself walking between them, and the group watched him till a turn in the rough trail hid him from sight.

By and by the sound of a distant shot came back from the direction in which Mormon Paul had vanished. It created no comment though more than a dozen men heard it, and then all was as still as before.

Hazel was conducted to one of the cabins which, unlike its neighbors, contained two apartments, and left to herself.

A little later in the day she received a visitor in the person of Lucky Livingstone, the man who had exposed her Mormon persecutor.

"It remained for Deuce-o'-Diamonds to get you out of the toils!" exclaimed the mountain pard.

"You have my thanks and my gratitude," was the reply.

Lucky Luke looked steadily at the girl for a moment.

"Did he tell the truth?" he asked at last.

"Are you really Mormon Paul's wife?"

A flush mounted to Hazel's temples.

"He told you so," she said equivocally and with a puzzling smile playing with her shapely lips.

"But is it true?" cried Luke, "I can't think of your being his wife."

"I am his wife after the Mormon ceremony."

"Oh, is that all?" and Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds burst into a laugh. "We don't recognize such matches in Colorado. A trip across the line divorces you."

"Is that your law here?"

"We call it law," was the answer. "Where did you first meet the Mormon priest?"

"At my father's house."

"In Utah?"

"Within a few miles of Salt Lake City."

"Was your father Mormon?"

"Heavens, no! He hated the Saints with all the fervor of a true Gentile."

"But what brought him to Utah?"

Hazel became pale again.

"I don't know all the story; but I am sure that a falsehood of some kind did the work."

"One of Mormon Paul's schemes?"

"I am not quite sure of that."

"Where did you come from?"

"From New York City."

"How long ago?"

"Seven years."

"Think me inquisitive if you like, but I can't help putting a few questions."

"Go on," responded the girl whose curiosity was increasing.

"You call yourself Hazel," he went on in a moment. "Is that the name your parents gave you?"

"No. I got it when I was initiated into the mysteries of the Mormon religion."

"The Saints took even your name away, eh?"

"They did."

"But you have not forgotten your true name?"

"No; they could not rob me of my memory. I am Nydia Nolan."

"Nydia the Gentile, in spite of the Mormon marriage!" laughed Livingstone.

"In spite of all their schemes," echoed the girl.

"Where are your parents?"

"They are dead."

"Did the Saints have anything to do with their deaths?" cried the miner. "By Jove! I wish we had held the rascal. He's not out of reach yet!"

And the speaker threw a look toward the door that stood ajar.

"Let him go," replied Hazel, with a shudder of aversion. "I am out of his fingers at last. I feel that a new life is dawning for me. Out of the clutches of the white sepulchers of Mormonism! Oh, Heaven, I thank thee!"

Lucky Livingstone regarded the girl in silence until the prayer seemed to leave her lips, then he asked:

"Whither do you want to go?"

"I want to be safe," was the quick answer.

"You are safe here."

"Then I am satisfied."

The words were barely out of Hazel's mouth when Livingstone sprung up and went to the door.

Opening it a little wider he stood at the threshold a few seconds, watched eagerly by Hazel, who wondered what had taken place to attract him.

"Come here," suddenly came over the man's shoulder, and the girl stepped forward.

"We're getting more visitors," continued Luke. "Yonder they go; look at 'em!"

The next instant the eyes of Hazel became fixed on a number of men who were walking past the cabin.

In silence she counted them, sixteen in all, saw their splendid physique, their quick, eager strides, and their bearing.

To her they looked like a band of mountain Vigilantes.

"Mebbe they're after Mormon Paul; but they're not Saints," smiled Livingstone.

Hazel started.

"They are after us!" exclaimed she, clutching the man's arm. "I know them now. I recognize the man at their head. They belong to Bumblebee City, and are on our trail!"

"Don't you want to meet them?"

"Heavens, no! If what Paul said is true, I do not want to see Chispa Chick and his pards. They hate everything Mormon—"

"So do we, girl."

"Yes, but we left a dead man behind us when we left Bumblebee—one of the pards of the camp. Those men will take vengeance on me if they can't find Paul."

"I'd like to see 'em do it!" said Lucky Luke. "Thar's no feud between Bumblebee and Deuce-o'-Diamonds; but we'll have something to say if the men out yonder want you!"

Already the party who had just entered the camp had come in contact with some of its citizens, and while Hazel looked she saw several glances thrown toward the cabin she occupied.

"They know I am here!" she exclaimed.

"Well, what of it?" cried Livingstone. "They will be told in plain language that no hand, Mormon or Gentile, touches you without the consent of Deuce-o'-Diamonds. We will put them on Paul's trail, and keep 'em away from yours. You are nobody's wife. We don't recognize Mormon laws in Colorado. Wait here till you hear from the pards of Bumble."

The following moment the girl was alone, and she soon saw Lucky Livingstone join the mingled men a short distance away.

He found the pards of Bumblebee eager to come up with Mormon Paul. They had made forced marches from the wild capital in the Silver Hills, and were as eager as ever to overtake the man who had slipped through their fingers, but not until he had taken a life to make his way clear.

Solid Silver Dick had detailed the Mormon's visit to Deuce-o'-Diamonds by the time Livingstone came up, and Chispa Chick and his comrades knew that Hazel had been kept back.

"The girl isn't Mormon, and nobody touches her," spoke Solid Dick, finishing his remarks. "She is still here, and we've decided that she kin go or stay, just as she pleases. She's no more Mormon Paul's wife than she is mine. The ceremony is all there ever was of it. We kin show you the exile's trail. The mules war fagged out when the couple struck camp, and won't do him much good, for they didn't rest."

There was an instant clamor on the part of Chispa Chick's men to be led forward. The

trail was hot, and the trackers were eager to finish the job.

"What do you intend to do with Mormon Paul if you catch him?" asked Livingstone.

"We shall first take him back to Bumble."

"Alive?"

"Yes."

"After that, what?"

"We shall try him for the life he choked off at the sheds."

"Then you won't hand him back to the Church for trial?"

"No. Curse the Church, anyhow!" was the response. "We want an eye for an eye. We want the blood of the Mormon outlaw—we intend to swing him to the limb of the council tree in Bumblebee City."

This intention was heartily approved by the pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

Six of them volunteered to swell the party of avengers, and cheered by those who remained behind, the band started off on the Mormon's trail.

Hazel at the door of the cabin witnessed the departure and breathed free once more.

She could not help praying inwardly that the human sleuth-hounds of Colorado would overtake the man of crime, but she did not want to see him again.

It was a long day to the girl, but no one came to disturb her reflections, for both Livingstone and Solid Silver Dick had augmented the strength of the trailers, and with no other citizens of the camp had she become acquainted.

Night dropped down almost suddenly, like the swoop of a somber eagle.

The rescued girl watched at the door till she could distinguish no figures in the camp, then she threw herself wearily upon the little bed against the wall, but not to sleep.

All at once a confused murmur of voices assailed her ears.

In an instant she was on her feet and at the door.

Several torches darted before her eyes like Jack-o'-lanterns, but they were some distance away.

"Hazel?" said a voice at the door, so sudden that she went backward with a light exclamation; but in a moment she was at the threshold again.

"It didn't take us very long, after we got started," continued the same voice which she had recognized as Lucky Livingstone's. "We caught the Mormon Spider unawares, and the men o' Bumble say that he sha'n't escape."

"Where is he?" asked the girl.

"He's safe enough down yonder," Lucky Luke pointed over his shoulder. "He's lashed to the mule, and a cordon of six-shooters surrounds him. Do you want to see him Hazel?"

"No, no!" cried the girl, drawing back again.

CHAPTER X.

NEW COMPLICATIONS.

LUCKY LIVINGSTONE drew off and left the girl alone.

Hazel shut the door of the cabin so as to exclude the flaring lights which she now knew surrounded the Mormon who had been hunted down by the Vigilantes of Bumblebee City, and in a moment she was seated on the edge of the little cot, silent and thoughtful.

The man who had just left went back to the captors and their captive.

His mind was as busy as the girl's.

"She's nobody's wife," he muttered. "That Mormon ceremony amounts to nothing. It binds them no tighter than would a wisp of straw. Besides, Chispa Chick and his pards intend to make short work of the Saint. He ought to feel a little Colorado vengeance, for he passed judgment on me under the Tabernacle. She is pretty," he smiled as his thoughts went back to the girl. "Born in New York, Gentile blood in her veins, parents dead—Jehui! what else ought a fellow to ask?"

Lucky Luke had come up to the torches, and he ceased to think in sentences as his gaze fell upon the face of the man who was firmly lashed to a sleepy-looking mule guarded by stalwart fellows in bronze armed with revolvers, which they exhibited without the slightest attempt at concealment.

Mormon Paul and Livingstone exchanged looks, but the lips of neither parted, and Lucky Luke passed on.

"Does the girl want to look at him?" asked a voice at Livingstone's elbow, and the speaker nodded toward the Mormon priest.

"She says not," replied Livingstone.

"She won't get another chance. Chispa and his pards are about to start with him."

"Let them go."

Solid Silver Dick walked over to a man and spoke to him in a low tone.

A smile appeared on Chispa Chick's face, and Lucky Luke noticed that he looked once toward the cabin where Hazel was.

When the two men separated, the captain of the Avengers of Bumblebee stepped to Mormon Paul's side.

"Do you want to see her before we set out?" he asked the prisoner.

In an instant the Saint's eyes seemed to flash. "My wife, you mean?" he said, through his

teeth. "No, I don't want to see the traitress! No thanks for the privilege, Chispa Chick," and Paul relapsed into sullen silence again.

A minute afterward the word "Forward!" started the band off, and, with two men at the mule's head and well-flanked by others as stalwart, Mormon Paul started for the mining capital of the Silver Hills.

The route led past Hazel's new abode, and nearly every eye glanced at it as the avengers filed by.

It was only the keenest sight that saw beyond the window the semblance of a girlish face beautified by a pair of expressive eyes which had singled out the mule and its burden.

Hazel stood inside and held her breath while she watched Mormon Paul disappear on his way to doom, and when the vision had vanished, she let slip a sigh of relief which was supplemented by a fervent "Thank Heaven!" that welled up from the depths of her soul.

It was night when Chispa Chick and his friends returned to Deuce-o'-Diamonds with their quarry, and as the trail through the mountains was hard to keep, the journey promised to be painfully slow.

In the darkest places two hands would clutch the bridle-rein and the ghostly guard would contract on either side until their elbows almost touched the hunted apostle of the Mormon faith.

Anxious to see the end, six denizens of Deuce-o'-Diamonds were accompanying the avengers back.

Lucky Livingstone was one of these.

He had suffered so much at the hands of the Saints, that he wanted to see Mormon Paul treated as he deserved, and then he was anxious to report in person to Hazel the doom of her persecutor.

"What about this man whose coming to Bumblebee let the Mormon get away?" Livingstone whispered to Chispa Chick while they walked side by side over a comparatively level stretch of the homeward trail.

"We didn't get to find out much about him before we came away. He calls himself Don Domingo."

"That sounds Mexicanish."

"He came up from Arizona."

Livingstone looked like a man about to sound a whistle of surprise.

"What fetched him to Bumblebee, Chispa Chick?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think he interfered in the Mormon's favor?"

"He held us back as long as he could."

"The—deuce he did! Why didn't you attend to him as one o' the Saint's accomplices before you came away?"

"I did not feel justified in doing that."

"He may not be there when you get back."

"Then he won't interfere again," smiled the captain of the guard.

"You've told me just enough about Don Domingo to make me want to see him," resumed Lucky Luke, after a short pause. "If he really came up from the southern border, I may know him."

"You may," echoed Chispa Chick, and he stopped suddenly to go back to the men who walked alongside the prisoner.

Morning broke over the mountains and found the avengers going down the slope at the foot of which nestled the cabins of Bumblebee City.

Already there were expressions of joy on the faces of the mountain pardes, and many were the glances of triumph thrown toward the Mormon Mazepa who had been guarded most vigilantly through the night.

A few miles further on one of the men sprung up on a gigantic boulder and let off a wild shout that echoed like the report of a gun throughout the wild region roundabout.

In an instant he was seen by a score or more of pigmy people among a lot of cabins lower down, and a faint answering shout came back, and hats were seen to whirl in the air.

Bumblebee City was in sight!

If the Vigilantes of the Silver Hills could have singled out the men who had heard the shout from the trail, they would have seen the well-knit figure and the face of Don Domingo or, in other words, Richard Redfire the detective.

The man sleuth had remained in Bumble waiting quietly but with a good deal of inward impatience a report of the man-hunt across the mountains.

He had promised himself that he would wait four days. If at that time there was no news from Chispa Chick, he would slip quietly from Bumble and take up the trail about which he had several times conversed with Romeo.

His countenance betrayed no emotion while he waited for the avengers, and when the little sport's eyes discovered that the hand had a captive lashed to a mule, he smiled to himself, but said nothing.

"They have him! Look! I told you so!" cried Romeo, clutching the detective's sleeve while he pointed toward the band just entering the camp. "Chispa Chick is as sure as a bloodhound. He could follow a man around the world and catch him!"

Don Domingo made no reply beyond another

smile, this time at Romeo's display of excitement.

The sports of Bumble awaited the procession in the square in front of Durg's Hotel.

It was a quiet, but a determined crowd, and every eye had singled out the man on the mule and was watching him like a hawk.

Within the next two minutes Chispa Chick and his party came to a halt, and their ranks parted to let their comrades see the result of the trail.

In a moment the gaze of Don Domingo and Chispa met.

"We did not fail," said the captain of the avengers, as he covered the distance between him and the detective by a single stride.

"So I see," was the rejoinder. "But I thought there were two?"

"There war two, but the girl wasn't Mormon, and we left her behind."

"To starve?" spoke the shadower, resentingly.

"Not while thar's a crust in Deuce-o'-Diamonds!" laughed Chispa Chick, and just then he caught sight of Lucky Livingstone whose gaze was fastened on the New York detective.

"Do you know that man over yonder?" he resumed, throwing a look toward Lucky Luke.

"Which one?"

"The big fellow with pieces of fringe at his collar."

Don Domingo eyed Lucky Livingstone for a second, then shook his head.

"He looks like he knows you!"

"Yes, I know him," said the detective to himself. "I did not expect to encounter him in this country nor on this trail. His study of me does not seem to be very satisfactory, though he may get satisfaction out of it with some effort. Have I crossed the continent for a woman's sake to meet the man of all men whom I don't want to meet? Is this fate or accident? By heavens! to me it has the tinge of fate."

By this time one-half of Chispa Chick's men had ranged themselves along Durg's bar, and were moistening their throats and recounting the chase across the mountains after the Mormon apostle.

Mormon Paul was left under the eyes of the pardes who were fresh, and who had remained in camp, and they were giving him at that moment all their attention.

Richard Redfire moved nearer to the prisoner, but his advance was a signal for the mountain men to contract their lines as if they feared an attempt at rescue.

"They don't want to trust me," passed through the detective's mind. "They think I am Mormon Paul's accomplice, and that I will cut the fellow loose in spite of their revolvers. I am more interested in the Mormon than they dream, if he is the man he may be. Who knows but that I have come out here to fight for the meanest and most dastardly villain that ever set foot on American soil? Nothing is to turn me from my purpose. I told Sybil so thousands of miles from this camp of men-devils, and I intend to keep my word!"

All at once Mormon Paul caught the eye of the human sleuth, and his gaze rested there.

"Who doubts it now?" whispered more than one man to his neighbor. "We must watch Don Domingo like a pack of lynxes. Those two men are pardes; they have just exchanged signals of pardship. The man from Arizona saved the Mormon wretch once. He must not be permitted to do so again!"

This declaration was superfluous, for every man in Bumblebee had made up his mind as to the future, and Richard Redfire, from that moment was surrounded by a lot of cool-headed, merciless spies.

When he turned and walked away he was followed by the eyes that suspected him, and not an audible word was spoken till he had vanished.

"Your pard can't play another hand for you," exclaimed a man, leaning toward Mormon Paul.

"I have no pard," was the answer which was greeted by a laugh of derision.

"We understand the lay-out, Mormon Paul. Looks speak louder than tongues sometimes. There shall be no double game in Bumble! You might as well prepare to join the departed Saints of your infamous faith. There is no hope!"

There was no reply through the wedded lips of the man in the shadow of death.

He merely turned his head and saw the figure of Chispa Chick emerge from the hotel, with Lucky Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds talking at his ear.

"I know him now!" said Lucky Luke. "Don Domingo, eh? He is here to take the Mormon from your clutches, and unless you fellows show undaunted grit, the detective will score the greatest triumph of his life."

Chispa Chick shut his teeth hard and said nothing.

CHAPTER XI. THE RESPITE.

JUSTICE sometimes hangs fire even among the Vigilante-infested camps of the Wild West.

A week after the events just described Mormon Paul was still alive and still an inhabitant of Bumblebee City.

He did not owe his escape from a swift halter to any change of sentiment in his favor in the minds of Chispa Chick and his comrades.

The stern men of the Silver Hills hated the Mormons as much as ever, and the exile priest was still in the shadow of the avenging noose.

Disappointed at not witnessing a speedy execution, the pardes of Deuce-o'-Diamonds, or the most of them—had tramped back over the mountains to their own camp.

Chispa Chick had promised to inform them about the opening of the Mormon's trial which, of course, would be a farce, and then they would come back to be in at the death.

This is what had lengthened Mormon Paul's days: Somehow or other a strange rumor had crept into camp.

No one could tell where it had started, but it went from lip to lip and gained credence as it passed along.

It was to the effect that Mormon Paul was not the man wanted by the executioners of the Mormon church—that, while he greatly resembled the banished priest, he was quite another person who did not deserve death at the hands of the Colorado pardes.

When questioned concerning these rumors, the prisoner who had been guarded day and night with sleepless energy, assumed a mysterious air which only increased the excitement.

"The wrong man has been hanged before," was one of his favorite replies. "You fellows are not infallible, and in your eagerness to spill a little Mormon blood, you may shed some as good as your own."

Don Domingo had taken his departure.

The detective left in the full glare of day and with no secrecy at all.

He said he was going up to Denver on a business mission, and intimated rather plainly that he had not seen Bumble for the last time.

Chispa Chick and his comrades seemed [to breathe freer after the sleuth's departure.

He had not disabused their minds of the suspicion that, in reality, he was Mormon Paul's accomplice.

During his sojourn in camp he had been watched by a lot of human hawks who thought their vigils were unobserved when the contrary was the fact.

Lucky Livingstone who professed to know the detective kept strangely silent about him even to Chispa Chick.

The pard of Deuce-o'-Diamonds had gone home, but not to stay long.

Several days after his departure he came back to hear with astonishment that Don Domingo had quietly mounted his horse and ridden off.

"Which way did he go?" eagerly questioned Lucky Luke.

"He said he was going to Denver."

"Did he take the Denver trail?"

"Yes."

"Why was he not followed?"

"We were glad to get rid of him in any shape."

Livingstone's features grew shaded and he sat silent in the Chick's presence.

"Don't you think he has gone to Denver?" suddenly asked the head man of Bumblebee City.

"No, I don't!" blurted Livingstone. "He isn't going to put that distance between himself and Mormon Paul."

Chispa Chick laughed.

"Mormon Paul is it?" said he. "Some of the boys half believe we have the wrong man."

"I call him Mormon Paul all the same," replied Lucky Luke.

"What does the girl, Hazel, say now?"

"There is where I am puzzled," and Livingstone smiled strangely.

"Has she retracted?"

"No, but she has modified her first statement."

"How far?"

"She gives the man you hold the benefit of the doubt."

"Since when?"

"Since yesterday morning."

"There must be something in it!" exclaimed Chispa Chick. "Tell me what the girl says."

"She tells me that we may hold the wrong man after all."

"Doesn't she say how we may be mistaken?"

"She refuses to explain."

"Does the girl want to go back to Mormon Paul?"

"Heavens, no!" cried Livingstone, and his hand struck the table in the cabin. "She shouldn't move a step toward him if she wanted to. I stand between Hazel and the man you keep in the shadow of the noose. Are you waiting for more rumors about him?"

"We are waiting for Romeo to come in."

"Where is Romeo?"

"The little hermit is off on a mysterious mission. He has promised to have the facts inside of a few days."

"What facts?"

"Those about Mormon Paul."

"What do you want to know?"

"We want to satisfy ourselves about him."

"Whether he is the exiled priest or not?"

"Yes."

"If he should not be, what?"

"We will then try him as a simple citizen for the killing of the man at the sheds the night he slipped through our hands with the girl."

"But you won't do anything till Romeo returns?"

"We don't want to."

"The prisoner may give you the slip again."

"He cannot. Mormon Paul is watched night and day."

"Notwithstanding all this, you may keep him too long. Romeo may never come back."

"What do you mean?"

"You forget the detective."

"Don Domingo?"

"Yes."

"What has he to do with Romeo's absence?"

"We can surmise. I have told you that he doesn't want your rope to tighten under Mormon Paul's chin. He more than half believes that he has found the man he lost years ago not far from this very spot. He has come back to the old trail. Heaven knows where he struck the clew, but these keen sleuth-hounds are holy terrors. Now, if Mormon Paul is the man Don Domingo wants, do you think he will let you strangle him under any circumstances?"

Chispa Chick looked silently into Livingstone's face and then leaned forward to answer in resolute tones:

"I told you the day we brought Mormon Paul to camp that no man should cheat the noose of its victim. A few days may intervene between the man and his fate, but nothing can avert it. If we can't hang the prisoner as Mormon Paul we can deal with him as a common assassin. And we will! Romeo will settle all when he comes back."

"Did the little hermit go to Salt Lake?"

"Perhaps."

Lucky Livingstone fell back in his chair and broke into a laugh.

"What does he expect to discover there?" he exclaimed. "Can't you see that he is likely to let the cat out of the bag, and before you can pull the noose over the prisoner's head, if he be Mormon Paul, you will have the Executioners of the Church down upon you? Then won't get to take vengeance for the man throttled at the sheds."

"How long has Romeo been gone?"

"Barely twenty-four hours."

"Within how many days is he to return?"

"There was no time set, but he knows that we want to push the job through."

"It beats me," smiled Lucky Livingstone.

"I say again that you may hold your prisoner too long. However, you and Mormon Paul for it."

Lucky Luke went back to Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

At the end of a week the Mormon was still a living prisoner, and the occupant of a strong cabin which had been prepared for his reception.

He seldom saw any one, and his guard were not disposed to tell him why his trial had been put off.

He did not know that so much depended on the return of Romeo, the dwarf-hermit of the Silver Hills.

Day after day his face appeared at the grated window of his prison, and the pards of Bumble would watch him while they played with a greasy deck in front of the cabin.

During those days Mormon Paul did not get one look of sympathy.

He saw from his window a lot of stern bronze faces, and, watch them as he might, and as he did, he could see no gleam of pity in the dark eyes beneath the raven lashes.

The first week passed without bringing Romeo.

Chispa Chick looked more than once during the day down the trail which left the camp on the west and lost itself among the mountains toward sunset.

"We don't want ter wait ter eternity for Romeo," said a voice at the Chick's elbow as he stood among the shadows of dusk with his eyes on the path he had watched before.

The boss of Bumblebee City looked at the speaker—a giant in dark clothes.

"I say the boys ar' tired o' guardin' the halter food we hold in the cabin," continued the man. "Besides, Romeo may never get back. Must we wait till Gabriel blows his horn for the little pard o' the mountains?"

"No."

"I thought you'd listen ter reason, cap'n. I told the boys so before I started out ter look for you. How much longer shall we wait?"

Chispa Chick did not reply.

He held the fate of the prisoner in his keeping.

"I would like to hear from Romeo," he said at length, with the eyes of the comrade fastened upon him. "He ought to be here now."

"Did he have ter go?" queried the camp pard. "I wanted to make sure of the prisoner's identity, you know."

Lucky Livingstone recognized him, an' the girl said—

"The girl is not so sure of it now," interrupted Chispa Chick, at which the pard looked amazed.

"She ought ter know," fell from his tongue.

"If anybody knows, it should be Hazel."

Five minutes later Chispa Chick walked back to his cabin.

Shutting the door behind him, he struck a light and took from a secret compartment in one of the numerous logs that surrounded him, a piece of paper and the stub of a pencil.

"Why put it off any longer?" he muttered. "The boys are restless, and the man is guilty of one murder, anyway. I promised to send for Lucky Livingstone and the men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds who might want to attend the trial. I'll send Dark Dave across the hills to-night. I've waited a week for Romeo. I think I've been patient enough."

Chispa Chick began to write with the pencil, and in a moment was completely absorbed with his task.

The lamp before him threw his giant shadow on the logs, and not a sound broke the stillness in the cabin.

Slowly the lead wrote what was the same as Mormon Paul's death-warrant.

The dark fingers had not the elasticity of the rapid penman's, but they managed to get through with their work somehow.

Chispa Chick straightened with a smile, and then folded the message.

As he left the chair the door was opened, and the captain of the Silver Hills avengers stared at his visitor.

He saw the outlines of a horse against the jamb, and with them the face and figure of a woman, both entirely strange to him.

Chispa Chick covered his message with his hand and took a stride forward.

One of his hands went up and touched his hat to the woman.

"Is this Bumblebee City?" was the inquiry with which the sport was met.

Chispa bowed.

"Can I find a bed? I have ridden across this wild region till I am faint."

"You shall have the best Durg's ranch affords. Where is your escort?"

"I have none."

And the woman, who was still young, showed two rows of pearly teeth in a smile.

In a moment, with Mormon Paul and his message knocked entirely out of his head, Chispa Chick was walking alongside the new-comer toward Durg's Hotel.

"A seraph alone in Bumblebee?" thought he. "I wonder if she is in some way connected with Mormon Paul? One of his wives, maybe. Pshaw! what am I thinking about?" and he laughed at his ideas.

He conducted the woman to the hotel, and heard her say in response to Durg's questioning look:

"You may call me Sybil—Sybil the Nameless. I am willing to give my horse for a bed for one night only. Merciful Heaven! what terrible roads you have in Colorado!"

CHAPTER XII.

ROMEO COMES BACK.

A FEMALE guest at Colorado Durg's hostelry was something out of the common run of events.

The last one had been Hazel, Mormon Paul's companion; but here was a young woman who traveled alone, and who had crossed the mountains from somewhere on horseback.

Sybil was not permitted to retire without having been stared at as an object of pardonable curiosity.

It happened that the bar-room of the hotel had its usual guests when she arrived, therefore it had been impossible for her to escape notice.

Sybil the Nameless!

The name had a romantic and mysterious sound for the men of Bumblebee City who heard her lips pronounce it, and they wondered anew what had brought her to camp.

She showed fatigue on her countenance, and when she withdrew, piloted by Durg himself, a dozen men touched their hats by way of "good-night."

She was shown to the same room which a few days before had been the quarters of two other travelers for a spell.

Durg turned to depart when the woman touched his arm and he stopped.

He found a pair of lustrous dark eyes fixed upon him.

"Have you had a visitor from beyond the mountains within the last few days?" asked Sybil.

"We've had several," replied the landlord with a grin.

"Who were they?"

"In the first place we've got one of them with us just now."

"A man?" inquired the woman starting.

"Yes; Mormon Paul, we call him."

"I have nothing to do with Mormons. Who were your other visitors?"

"One was the Mormon's supposed wife."

"Go on."

"The other was Don Domingo."

"What about him?"

"He was mixed up with the Mormon, I guess."

"Did he come with the Saint?"

"No, but he wasn't far from his heels."

Sybil seemed to reflect a moment.

"Tell me what Don Domingo looked like," she said at length.

Colorado Durg drew a word portrait of the detective, and the woman listened breathlessly to the close.

Once he saw a singular light flash up in her eyes, but it almost instantly disappeared.

"I guess she thought she knew him, but now she don't think so," thought the landlord as the light went out in Sybil's eyes.

"Is Don Domingo here now?" quietly asked Sybil at the close of the description.

"He is not. Shortly after they fetched the Mormon back, he went away—to Denver he said."

"That is far off is it not?"

"It is a long ride."

"I thank you for your kindness," Sybil said; but Durg, instead of touching his hat and departing, lingered at the door.

"I am not going to stay long," the woman went on, thinking perchance that she was answering the landlord's mental questions. "I am on the hunt of a friend, and as he is not here, of course there is no inducement for me to tarry."

"He may come in a few days."

Sybil slightly shook her head.

"If he has not been here, he will not come," she responded, and then she threw a longing look toward the couch which took Colorado Durg away with a pleasant good night which found an echo in a gentler tongue than his.

The pards of Bumblebee awaited Durg with impatience in the bar-room.

A laugh greeted his appearance, and some brusque sallies were fired at him till he set out his liquors and told the crowd to help itself, an invitation which required no second.

"What did she want to know?" queried Chispa Chick, when he and Colorado Durg were the sole occupants of the bar-room.

"She's looking for a friend."

The Chick's face lit up with a pleased look of interest.

"Is that friend Mormon Paul?" he asked.

"She hates Mormons."

"Oho! But didn't she give you a clew to her friend—nothing of the sort, Durg?"

"I thought I had it once, but I guess I was on the wrong track."

"What did you think?"

"Her eyes snapped for a moment while I was describing Don Domingo; but they got dull before I was through."

"Then you thought for a second that that detective was the friend she seeks?"

"I did."

Chispa Chick did not get to make another observation before a shout in which was mentioned a name came into the hotel from without.

"Romeo has come!" cried Durg, leaning over the counter and catching Chispa's sleeve.

"Romeo!"

The name possessed a magic sound for the boss of Bumblebee City.

"Where is Romeo?" he cried, springing back and then darting to the open door, where he stopped and listened to the voices of men and the tread of many feet.

He knew with what impatience the pards of the camp had waited for the little hermit of the hills, on whose mission hung the doom of Mormon Paul, the captive.

In less than a minute there were twenty shouting men in front of the hotel, and above the Babel of voices Chispa Chick could distinguish the name of Romeo pronounced in accents of wildest joy.

The head tough of Bumblebee stepped back as the crowd surged into the place bearing on their broad shoulders the well-known figure of the hermit sport.

It was a scene so wild and tumultuous that when Colorado Durg thought of his guest upstairs, he put in a remonstrance, but without avail.

As well might he have tried to drown a cataract with his voice.

Romeo was out of breath when he was stood up on the counter in front of the crowd.

There was dust on his boots and other evidences of travel on his clothes, and while he took breath half a dozen men told Chispa Chick how they had discovered him just inside the camp limits only to jerk him from the saddle and to bear him in triumph to the hotel.

Twenty tongues began clamoring at once for Romeo's report.

He was adjured by everything good and bad to tell what he had found out about the man in the guarded cabin; he shook his head and looked toward Chispa Chick for instructions.

"I'll be the mouthpiece," suddenly said Chispa, throwing up one hand. "I sent Romeo away, and he should report to me first."

"That is true," replied some one in the crowd, and the tumult subsided as the little man was permitted to come down from the counter and to walk away with Chispa Chick.

The crowd followed to the door of the ranch and watched the two men as they went down the street toward the big sport's cabin.

There was another person who watched them with almost equal interest.

The first shout had driven Sybil the Nameless from her couch in the room above the bar.

Who was Romeo, and why was he being carried through the mingled moonshine and starlight on the shoulders of a mob of giants in mountain garb?

The weird scene had an unspeakable fascination for Sybil, and she watched it from her window till it vanished in the building.

Then she went to the door and held it ajar while she listened to the sounds that came up the narrow stairs.

"There is mystery about all this," her lips said, speaking her thought aloud. "I know that the return of Romeo has to do with the fate of the man they call Mormon Paul. Where is Richard Redfire? He intimated before quitting New York that this region was likely to be the battle-ground—the spot where he would take up the lost clew and follow it to the end. Has he been here? Can it be that Don Domingo is the man I have crossed the continent to find? I waited for word from him till I could wait no longer. Does his silence mean that I have lost the help of the famous sleuth I drew from his rest to throw forward on a trail of mystery and death? Heaven forbid!"

Sybil drew back from the door when she heard that Romeo was to report to Chispa Chick in private.

She went to the window and saw the giant and the dwarf go up the street together, and with a curiosity as great as that of the speculative crowd at the door below, she watched them out of sight.

Chispa Chick and Romeo exchanged but few words between Colorado Durg's and the sport's cabin.

When the latter had been gained, he flew at the little hermit with the vehemence of a hawk, and Romeo felt the vise-like clutch of five fingers on his arm.

"Where have you been?" asked Chispa.

"For one place, to the City of the Saints," was the reply as Romeo tried to greet the speaker's eagerness with a smile.

"To Salt Lake?" cried Chispa Chick.

Romeo nodded.

"Well, what did you discover? Is the man we hold Mormon Paul, the exile?"

"No."

The promptness and emphasis of the reply seemed to take Chispa's breath.

He looked at Romeo a full second before he spoke again.

"That's something gained," said he. "But it doesn't save the fellow's neck. We will try him for the murder at the sheds."

"If he killed anybody there," remarked Romeo coolly.

Chispa Chick gave a quick start that carried him half-way to the hermit-sport who eyed him from a chair.

"You don't mean to say that the man we call Mormon Paul did not choke the pard to death the night he slipped through our hands with the girl, Hazel?" he cried. "Here! you must not go beyond the bounds of truth, Romeo."

"I won't argue the case," smiled the hermit of the Silver Hills. "You sent me away to discover what I could. I've obeyed your instructions to the letter; but you don't want to hear me."

"That is not it! I want your report, not your opinions," replied Chispa Chick. "Now go back. How do you know that the man in the cabin under guard isn't Mormon Paul?"

"He couldn't be and be alive."

"What?"

"Mormon Paul—the exile of the Church I mean—is dead!"

Romeo spoke with confidence.

"Did the Executioners of the Faith find him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Within the last thirty days."

"Prove it."

With striking coolness Romeo produced a paper from an inner pocket and extended it toward Chispa Chick, by whom it was taken eagerly.

"Where did you get this?" exclaimed the sport, with a glance at the document.

"You forget that I went among the Saints on a mission of discovery," was the response.

"You've played a deep hand somehow." And the Chick's gaze went back to the paper.

"I guess that settles it," said he, a moment later. "This seems to be the report of the Secret Executioners of the Mormon Tribunal who followed Mormon Paul, the sentenced, and who took vengeance for the Church."

Romeo said nothing.

"The boys won't like to hear this, but we will try the prisoner for murder anyhow," spoke Chispa, resolutely.

"You're bound to have his blood I see," laughed Romeo. "The girl, Hazel, won't swear that he took anybody's life at the sheds."

Chispa Chick looked thunderstruck.

CHAPTER XIII.

COOLLY CAUGHT.

"You don't want to be too certain of that, my man!" cried the boss of Bumblebee, when he recovered. "You seem to forget that she witnessed the affair, that while Mormon Paul

was dealing with our pard, she wasn't ten feet away."

Romeo looked up at Chispa Chick with an amazed expression.

His eyes said plainly "Wait and see," and the look further irritated the big sport, who went off again, this time about Mormon Paul's escape from the camp the night of Don Domingo's arrival.

"By the way," suddenly put in Romeo, catching at the detective's name, "has Don Domingo been back?"

"Of course he has not," was the answer. "The fellow saw that it wouldn't be policy for him to stay and attempt a second rescue. You did not meet him on your mission?"

The hermit-sport shook his head.

An hour after Romeo's return, Chispa Chick met his comrades near the cabin which held Mormon Paul.

There he repeated the report made by the dwarf, and the men of Bumblebee received it with ejaculations of wonder.

Some said boldly that they put very little faith in it, yet not one advanced so far as to impeach the witness.

Colorado Durg was alone in his bar-room during the consultation.

He had been promised an early report of the affair, and he was anxious to learn what was to be done.

Suddenly there fell upon the landlord's ears a sound which he knew so well.

The latch of the stair-door had clicked, and when Durg looked up he saw the face of his last guest, Sybil the Nameless.

An apparition from the realm of spirits would not have startled Durg more at that moment than did the sight which met his gaze.

Sybil opened the door wide, came down the remaining steps, and crossed the floor on tip-toe.

"Are you all alone?" asked the woman, in tones a little raised above a whisper.

"That's just how I'm fixed," was the answer. "They won't be back for ten minutes yet, maybe."

"They?" was the echo.

"Yes, the boys are digesting Romeo's report."

"Tell me about Romeo's mission," and the eyes that looked into Colorado Durg's face were restless as silent pleaders.

Durg saw nothing to prevent Sybil from having the whole story of the somewhat startling events which had excited Bumblebee City during the last two weeks.

He leaned an elbow on the counter and began.

Sybil proved an attentive listener, and, when fairly started, the landlord of the mountain camp was not a bad story-teller.

The part that seemed to have the greatest charm for the woman was the hand which Don Domingo had appeared to play.

It was not made clear to her that the detective had rescued Mormon Paul and Hazel, or, in other words, had given them an opportunity to slip away from the miners.

She seemed to believe that the meeting of the two parties in the hotel had been the result of accident, but Durg thought otherwise, though he did not express himself plainly to that effect.

"What will they do with the prisoner?" asked Sybil at the close of Durg's narrative.

"What ought they to do with him?" was the quick retort.

"But suppose Romeo has discovered that he is not Mormon Paul?"

"That's not likely," laughed Durg. "Can't we read a Mormon when we see one?"

"You may think so."

"By Jupiter! we can, miss," and the landlord brought his fist down upon the counter by way of emphasis. "I beg your pardon. You don't know much about the nest of vipers over in Utah. If you did you would not doubt our ability to tell 'em on sight. Romeo may have discovered something we do not look for, but no difference what it is, it won't save the neck o' Mormon Paul. Maybe you'd like to see the prisoner."

"Not particularly at this time."

"To-morrow may be too late."

Sybil started slightly.

"We won't waste time any longer," continued Durg. "If we hadn't been waiting a week on Romeo, that'd be one Mormon apostle less to-night."

Sybil the Nameless made no reply.

The following minute several mingled voices came in from the street beyond the door.

Her inquiring look met the landlord's gaze.

"The council is over," said Durg, and Sybil's hand touched his hand as she said hurriedly:

"Don't mention that I am up," and as Durg assured her that he would not, she slipped to the door, opened it, and vanished up-stairs.

"What do you think?" cried a coarse voice, as the portal closed on Sybil's figure, and a stalwart man stepped into the bar-room.

Durg's look was a question.

"Romeo says that Mormon Paul isn't Mormon at all," the man from the outside went on.

"He's come back with a whole pack of stuff that gets away with everybody's racket."

"What does Chispa think?" asked Durg.

"Pretty much as we do. Romeo says that

the girl we left in Deuce-o'-Diamonds won't swear that Mormon Paul did the work at the sheds. They talk of sending for her."

"That'll delay the trial."

"Not much; but since the little knowledge-box of the Hills wants to be so positive some of the boys would like to trip him."

"Chispa is going to start Dark Dave to Deuce-o'-Diamonds right away," put in one of the speaker's companions—there were four men in all. "He'll send a letter along to Lucky Livingstone to fetch the girl over in haste. We intend to see whether she will go back on her first statement."

"Did she ever say that she witnessed the choking?"

"Why not? She went off with Mormon Paul while Don Domingo kept us employed at the bar here."

"But did she ever tell any one that she saw the affair?" persisted Durg with the tenacity of a lawyer who has a slippery witness in hand.

"She did!" cried another man. "She told Lucky Livingstone, and the girl dare not go back on it, either."

This seemed to settle the point in controversy, and the four pards of Bumblebee refreshed themselves at the bar.

If they had been at the northern limits of the camp at that moment instead of where they were, they would have seen two men ride to within a few yards of the first cabin and draw rein there.

There was nothing peculiarly striking about the horsemen.

They were twins in size as could be seen in the uncertain light, and their horses were well blown as if they had come a long distance over rough roads.

"Shall we both go straight ahead?" whispered one of the men leaning toward his comrade.

"Yes. In union there is strength. Something tells me that we are not far from the quarry—the fair one that slipped from our grasp a great many miles from here. She wouldn't have given us all this trouble if we had caught the city rat a little sooner."

"Curse the city rat!" was the answering growl. "Zero and his chair will keep each other company through all time. Go ahead. We have no use for the masks now. If we find Sybil—remember; quick work and cool heads!"

The two horsemen rode slowly into Bumblebee past the dark cabins and straight toward Colorado Durg's Hotel.

The rather bright light that streamed from the windows of the bar-room proved a guiding star, and in a few moments the men rode along the building and drew rein at the very door.

The five men whom we saw last in the hotel were there still.

The door stood open, for the night was pleasant, and the horsemen could see the whole interior of the place.

"Jehosaphat! more pards from the outside!" exclaimed one of Durg's customers as he caught sight of the face which appeared in the doorway.

The whole crowd looked.

"Good-night, gents," smiled the mounted visitor who had two very black eyes above a long mustache that completely hid his mouth, and the next moment he threw one leg over the saddle and dropped to the ground.

Then the pards of Bumble saw that he had a companion, and that the couple were as much alike "as two peas."

The second man did not dismount, but as his companion walked into the hotel he leaned toward the entrance, with one hand lying strangely near the pommel of the saddle.

"We beg pardon, sir, but we would like to see the lady who is stopping here," continued the man on his feet.

"Sybil?" asked Durg, at which a smile of triumph appeared at each man's mouth.

"That is the person—Sybil. We don't like to disturb her if she has retired; but our business is imperative."

Colorado Durg moved down his counter.

"I will see," said he, addressing the mustached stranger. "She was up a little while ago, and may be so still."

He was at the stair-door, and had touched the latch when he found himself joined by the unknown.

"Is she up there?" he asked, glancing up the steps as Durg opened the door. "I will go up with you."

The two men went up the steps together shoulder to shoulder until a pine door barred their further progress.

Colorado Durg rapped timidly.

"What is it?" asked a woman's voice inside.

"A gentleman who has just come to camp wants to see you, Sybil," responded the landlord.

There was a little cry of mingled surprise and joy, and the following second the door opened to reveal the person of Colorado Durg's guest, backed by the light of a very primitive lamp.

The strange horseman stepped forward, and as he crossed the threshold his hand dropped upon the shoulder of the woman, who was already looking at him with eyes filled with amazement.

Colorado Durg, with the breeding of a true landlord, had left the couple alone, and was already half-way down-stairs.

"We have found you at last!" laughed the man who confronted Sybil, whose eyes had lost none of their startled expression. "You've given us a long chase—nearly across the continent; but nobody escapes us entirely. You don't seem to have found Richard Redfire yet. He must be masquerading under a hidden name. If we had found Zero a little sooner, woman, we wouldn't be catching you here."

Sybil the Nameless drew back, but the grip at her shoulder did not relax.

"You seem to know me now," continued the man. "For fear you don't, let me say that I am Silken Grip, the Man of Fate, and that I am not alone. Don't raise your voice or lift your hand. You are going away from here between two saddles, and when your paid detective, Richard Redfire, strikes your trail, if he ever does, he will discover that his more than master has played the hand which always wins!"

These were stern words for Sybil to listen to, and as they ceased, the hand of the speaker was transferred to her wrist, and she found herself descending the stair, a white-faced and breathless captive.

"Is there no hope?" she asked herself. "Must I go bound to my death between two merciless monsters?"

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN TWO DEMONS.

SYBIL threw a glance full of mute appeal at the group in the bar-room as she was marched to the door by the man who had called himself Silken Grip.

Colorado Durg and his companions did not respond, as if the two strange Apollos had either cowed them, or had let them know by some means that they were men of their own ilk, mountain toughs on a secret mission.

"Let the cowards go!" passed through Sybil's mind. "I will die before I ask them to protect me!" and then she was handed over to the one on the horse, who leaned forward and assisted her to the unoccupied saddle.

"Gentlemen, we are officers of Colorado law," spoke her captor as he faced the silent but inquisitive crowd in the bar-room. "We are sorry to deprive Colonel Durg's Hotel of its fair guest, but justice is no respecter of persons, and we are obliged to make an arrest much against our feelings. Good-night to all of you, gentlemen. There is nothing mean about us. You shan't go dry because we are going off in a hurry."

Something yellow and bright flashed in the lamplight for an instant, and there was the ring of gold for a second as an eagle spun round and finally settled down on Durg's counter.

Several of the men set up a light cheer, but the majority continued to watch the two men in silence until they rode off with their prisoner.

They did not go far, however, until one dismounted and went back, leaving Sybil in charge of the other.

"What is this for?" demanded the woman. "Didn't the captain tell you?" was the reply. "No; he merely said his name was Silken Grip. I know no such person."

"Think a moment," replied the stranger about whose lips a smile played as he looked into Sybil's face. "What did he tell you, anyhow? He was with you quite a little while."

"He told me that you two have chased me across the continent."

"That is true; we have."

"For what?"

"You are in our way."

Sybil recoiled from words like these.

"Tell me!" cried she. "I am Sybil. I am in your way. I can't solve the mystery."

"Wait till the captain comes. It won't be long, woman, and then you'll know more than you do now."

The Nameless did not speak again, and in a little while a man approached leading a horse.

As he came up Sybil recognized the animal she had ridden to Bumblebee City.

Silken Grip, the Man of Fate, had taken him quietly from the sheds near the hotel.

Without a word the fair prisoner was transferred to the saddle she had lately filled, and the journey was resumed.

More than once, when they crossed a belt of moonlight, Sybil looked alternately at her captors.

They were admirable studies in physique, but the more she looked at them, the deeper the mystery seemed to grow.

"Why did you stop where we found you?" suddenly asked Silken Grip.

The captive turned and stared at him without response.

"Why didn't you go on?" he continued. "But no matter; we would have found you anyhow. It was merely a question of time, Sybil. Nobody escapes us long."

"Are you detectives?" burst from the woman's throat.

"Do we look like sleuths?" and then both men laughed at once. "Do we resemble Richard Redfire who left New York some weeks ago to

disappear among the mountains of the Wild West?"

"No!" exclaimed Sybil.

"I thought not," resumed Silken Grip. "So you would like to know why we have followed you across the continent?"

"You dare not tell me!" bantered the woman.

"Dare not" is a phrase that cuts to the quick sometimes, and loosens many a tongue. Sybil, we have trailed you longer than you think. While you were in hiding in New York, and trying to bring Richard Redfire, the old Parisian sleuth-hound, over to your cause, did you never find shadows on your track?"

"Two of them!" asked Sybil, with a start.

"Yes."

"I recollect now!" she cried.

"Aha! your memory is being refreshed. When you first saw the shadows, you disappeared; in other words, you changed your place, and took another name. Why was this, Sybil?"

"You ought to know for you two men are the shadows I saw in New York!"

Silken Grip nodded to his comrade and said with a cold laugh.

"See what a little reflection does, Moro."

The next instant Sybil the Nameless whirled toward the man spoken to, and her eyes seemed to look him through.

"Moro!" cried she. "I know now into whose clutches I have fallen. You want me out of the road. I understand it all. I had hoped to elude you, for I knew that somewhere you were on my track. I have been hunted from the time I left my cradle to be thrust out upon the world without a name. I have dreamed that my father was hunted before me. What has become of the man who came into my house in Paris one night years ago, and tried to make me take an oath so terrible that the bare thought of it made me swoon at his feet? Are you his agent, Silken Grip? You are not that man himself. I did not see his face for he wore a mask as black as the heart he carried in his bosom; but his eyes photographed themselves on my memory, and I stand prepared to recognize them under any circumstances. But you have not answered me. Are you that man's friend?"

The two men appeared to enjoy Sybil's excitement.

"To whom do you refer?" asked Silken Grip.

"To one of the mysteries of Paris," was the answer. "Of course the man who came to me did not reveal his name. He kept that hid with the same care with which he concealed his face; but afterward, by an accident in which some people would have seen the hand of fate, I saw a pair of eyes for an instant only on one of the boulevards, and at the sound of a certain name the owner of those same eyes stopped suddenly—like a dog stops at his master's whistle. The name was Cartouche."

The men who flanked Sybil started slightly and exchanged looks and a smile.

"Are you certain that was the name?" asked Silken Grip.

"I recall the incident now as though it happened but yesterday. Cartouche! That was it. Are you in that man's employ?"

"What if we were, Sybil?"

"Then I want to say that you serve a devil who has been the evil-genius of our family—a fiend whose hand I have felt all my life."

"Don't be too sure of that. Cartouche may be too young to enjoy the notoriety you bestow upon him."

"Those eyes did not belong to a very young man," promptly replied the captive. "They were the serpent orbs of a person advanced in years as well as in crime. When he left me he threw on my bosom a bit of paper, in which he declared that unless I took the oath I would be hunted all my life by shadows which, in the end, would give me a nameless grave. I have the paper yet."

"With you?" quietly asked one of the men.

"No."

"We did not find it in your last house in New York."

"You searched it, then?" cried Sybil, a flush of indignation rising to her temples.

"We beat the bush as we go," was the answer.

"Keener eyes than yours would not have unearthed Cartouche's message. Some day I hope to hold it before the monster's face, and laugh at his astonishment."

"Some day?" echoed Silken Grip. "Do you expect to get through our fingers?"

This question seemed to bring Sybil the Nameless back to her present situation.

"If I am in the hands of men controlled by the villain Cartouche, I can expect no mercy," said she.

"You are in the power of people who want the oath taken—the oath you refused to take in Paris."

"I thought so!" was the fair captive's exclamation. "You have led me to this by your questions and by your actions. I thought that some day the oath would appear in some shape. What is it to you men now?"

"It is more than you think. It is as valuable to us now as it was when Cartouche stood before you and demanded it."

"Where is Cartouche?"

The question was an involuntary one, and one which Sybil could not have kept back if she had tried.

"We would like to know," was the startling answer.

"Has he left Paris?"

"He has disappeared."

"Then you are without a leader?"

"Not so! The death of Cartouche did not stop the work."

"Cartouche is dead! I trust the vengeance of Heaven overtook the wretch."

"You will have to ask that vengeance," smiled Silken Grip. "We do not know what became of him. All we know is that he has vanished from the knowledge of man."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Sybil the Nameless.

"You ought not to rejoice, as the death of Cartouche may cheat Richard Redfire, your detective, out of a signal victory."

Sybil gave the speaker a quick look.

"What has the masked Parisian—the man who stole into my rooms that night and left me in a swoon—to do with the mission of the American sleuth across the continent? I sent Richard Redfire from New York on an errand in which my whole life is involved. I heard him say that he would discover who I am—that he thought he had a clew—"

"Did he say this?" exclaimed Silken Grip.

"He said nothing less."

"What has been his report?"

"He has not reported."

"It was to find him—to know what he was doing—that you came to Colorado?"

"It was."

"You left just before we were able to close in on you in New York. We found out your hiding-place by dogging Zero. The little fellow has the cunning of a fox; but even old foxes are caught sometimes."

Sybil made no reply, and for a short distance the three steeds tramped the trail to the sound of no human voices.

"Now, Sybil, the time has come!" rung suddenly in the woman's ears, and at the same moment each of her wrists was caught by a hand that closed like a metallic vise.

She threw a quick glance from one face to the other.

Sternness and unbending mercy sat in the saddle on either side.

The horses stood silent like statues in a patch of moonlight that lay on the ground like a silver net.

"We want the oath," continued the same voice, which moved the lips of Silken Grip. "As I have said, the time for it has come. We want you to record on the books of heaven a solemn vow that you will from this moment ever cease to discover your identity—that you will be content to be till the hour of death simply Sybil, the Nameless."

The face of the beautiful mystery seemed to grow into a face of marble.

"What if I refuse to take the oath?" crossed her ashen lips.

"Then we will proceed to carry out the alternative."

"Which is—"

"Death! Not only death, but a grave which the angel of the resurrection shall not find!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SLEUTH'S NEW HAND.

CHISPA CHICK was profoundly astonished when he learned of the events which had transpired at Colorado Durg's hotel during his interview with Romeo and the subsequent meeting with the pards of the camp.

Sybil gone—taken off by two strange men?

It was somewhat startling even to the cool-headed captain of the Silver Hills Ranch.

Already he had sent Dark Dave across the mountains to Dence-o'-Diamonds with a message which was expected to almost depopulate that camp. He had sealed Mormon Paul's doom as far as he could, although the prisoner was to be accorded a trial in the presence of the representatives of both camps, and Hazel was looked upon as the witness who would surely tighten the halter about the Mormon's neck.

Chispa Chick was not satisfied until he had secured an accurate description of Sybil's abductors as they appeared for a few moments to the men in the bar-room.

They were not officers of Colorado law. Chispa Chick knew this, but he said nothing.

Already the couple had reached the mountains with their prisoner and pursuit was worthless.

Chispa Chick went back to a certain cabin where he expected to find Romeo, but the hermit spy and sport was not to be seen.

"He's gone back to his home among the hills to rest after his wonderful work," smiled the boss of Bumblebee, and his tones were full of derision. "He may have discovered that the man we hold is not the genuine Mormon Paul; but when he says that Hazel will not testify against him, he overreaches himself."

That night a closer watch than ever was placed on the Mormon's prison.

Did Chispa Chick fear that the two stern men who had carried Sybil off would come back and

play another hand equally as cool? Or was he mistrustful enough of Romeo's report to believe that beneath it lurked a scheme destined to rob him of his prey?

Romeo the hermit had gone back to his home in the mountains.

It was a cavern so buried from human sight that the trail leading to it was enough to baffle the keenest traveler.

But the mysterious little man could find it by night as well as by day, but he never crossed the hidden threshold until he had assured himself that he had no spy at his heels.

On this occasion Romeo was certain that he was not watched, much less followed, and when he reached the retreat he dissipated the shadows of an almost circular cabin with the light of a lamp and broke out into a shrill laugh.

"They don't want to take the last assertion, ha, ha!" cried Romeo. "The truth is they want Mormon Paul's blood and refuse to be satisfied with anything less. It isn't so easy to hoodwink Chispa Chick and his pards as one thinks, especially in a matter of this kind. He was ready to believe that I have been into the heart of Mormondom, and the signed report of the avengers which I place in his hands somewhat staggered him, but he does not think that the girl will refuse to swear against the prisoner. There is just where you miss the mark, Captain Chispa," and Romeo laughed again. "When you fetch Hazel down here and stand her before Mormon Paul, if you ever get to do this, you will find her a mute."

The hermit sport inspected a larder which he found by raising a large flat stone in one corner of the cave, and in a short time he was discussing a meal with all the zest of a half-starved person.

The lamp standing on the floor near Romeo's feet threw a ghostly light about the place, but the most of it fell against the dull stone wall at the hermit's back.

Romeo was oblivious to everything but the bones he was picking.

His ears were not on the alert for footsteps, and he did not once look up from the tin dish.

Therefore, the strange man did not see the figure that leaned against the wall almost directly in his front—a figure that resembled a carved statue set against the stone where rays of the lamp did not touch.

It was a living statue—a statue of flesh and blood, for the eyes that watched Romeo changed expression several times, and now and then a smile dealt with the contour of the lips.

The little man at last threw the last bone against the wall and washed the final mouthful down with a draught of something not water which he took from a bottle found in the larder.

Then he looked up satisfied.

"It wasn't a king's meal, but maybe I'll enjoy a better some day," he exclaimed. "The man I'm serving looks like a man of truth, and then what is Mormon Paul to me anyhow? Yes, what is the fellow who has been nearly everything in his life?"

"He's not much to you; that's a fact, Romeo."

In an instant the hermit dwarf was up like a Jack-in-the-box, and he presented an amusing attitude as he stood erect with his eyes darting fire and his fallow fingers wound about the butt of a half-drawn revolver.

"Don't bite before you bark," said the same voice, and the figure which had been posing against the wall moved toward Romeo, who retreated several steps and looked at it with a curious stare.

"Ho! ho! Captain Domingo!" suddenly laughed the hermit, as he thrust the six-shooter back into his belt, and then he held out his hand.

"By Jupiter! I did not expect to see you here. You must have the eyes of a night-hawk to be able to find my underground palace. But I forget that you are a night-hawk in more than name only."

The man who replied first with a smile to Romeo's words was our old acquaintance Don Domingo, or Richard Redfire, one name suiting him as well as the other.

"When did you drop in?" asked Romeo.

"When you were at supper."

"And I did not hear you! Where were my ears?" And the hermit put one hand up to his head in a ludicrous manner.

"You would not have heard the growl of a storm," laughed the detective.

"Maybe not; and over a bone, too!" was the rejoinder, and then the face of the dwarf suddenly became serious.

"You see I am back, Don Domingo—back from Salt Lake and other places."

"I see. Have you delivered your report?"

"I have."

"What did Chispa Chick say?"

"A part of it went down; the rest stuck."

Romeo showed his teeth in his reply.

"Didn't the document satisfy Captain Chispa?"

"It stunned him. I believe he thinks that the prisoner of Bumblebee is not Mormon Paul."

"That is good—"

"As far as it goes," finished Romeo.

Don Domingo nodded.

"They will settle all to-morrow," continued the hermit sport. "Dark Dave will come back from Deuce-o'-Diamonds with Hazel, Lucky Livingstone and the remainder of the pards. The girl is to convict Mormon Paul."

"She will not!" exclaimed the detective.

"I told Captain Chispa so."

"Well?"

"That is the part of my work which did not pan out very well."

"In other words, Bumblebee did not believe you?"

"It looks that way."

"See here, Romeo; a cool and clever hand must be played before the men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds enter the other camp."

"Go ahead," answered the hermit, his eyes sparkling with eagerness as they watched the face of Richard Redfire, which was now very close to his own.

"What is the guard about Mormon Paul's cabin?" asked the detective.

"Six men, with orders to keep their eyes open."

"How is the door secured?"

"With a chain, a staple and a padlock."

"Who carries the key?"

"Chispa Chick, of course."

"Is the lock an old one?"

"Old, but stubborn."

Romeo answered with the promptness and circumspection of a person who was not talking at random.

"If you intend a rescue you want to make as clean a job of it as the two Colorado officers made of theirs just before I left Bumble."

"What was that?"

"They rode into camp alone, but went out with Colorado Durg's lady guest."

The detective looked strangely at the hermit for a moment.

"I did not know there was an angel in the camp," said he.

"Neither did I until she had been taken away between two men who were not known to a single pard down there. It strikes me as being a queer, cool hand. Chispa Chick would have resisted, but he wasn't near Durg's when the hand was played. The men who were there let the cool-heads have their way."

"When did the woman come in?"

"Only a short time before the eagles swooped. They must have followed her, eh, Captain Domingo?"

The expression of the detective's face was enough to rivet Romeo's attention and to puzzle him.

"You did not hear her name, I presume?" resumed Richard Redfire at length.

"She called herself Sybil."

A startling exclamation burst from the sleuth's throat, and the man who until then had been seated close to Romeo bounded up like a ball.

"Sybil! My God! no!—not the Sybil I left thousands of miles from here!" the hermit heard while he looked at the person before him.

"Of course I don't know," was the answer.

"I did not get to see the woman; she was at Durg's when the pards carried me thither on their shoulders, but Chispa took me to his own shanty to listen to my report. She did not seem backward about giving her name to Durg when she came. Sandy Saul, the gossip of Bumblebee, ran against me as I was about to bid the camp good-by, and he opened his budget without solicitation. He saw the whole transaction, the coming and the going of the two mounted men. The woman didn't want to go. She let her eyes ask for protection, but as the pards stood dumb around the counter, she went off without a murmur. If you had been there, Don Domingo—"

"The woman would not have gone with the men!" cried the detective. "Great heaven! why was I absent at that critical moment? But why did Sybil cross the continent to fall into the hands of her old foe? Couldn't she curb her impatience? I told her it would take days, weeks perhaps, but that I would win in the end. I have found the clew missing for years. I have picked up the very link I lost in this country years and years ago. But now she comes upon the scene. She is followed by the sleuth-hounds of the old gang, they take her off to doom almost from within the shadow of my hand! What must I do? There are two trails for me now."

For the next five minutes Romeo watched the man who walked back and forth before his lamp like a tiger ceaselessly stretching his chain.

He did not know what to make of the detective.

All at once Richard Redfire stopped, and his hand dropped upon Romeo's shoulder.

The touch drove the hermit to his feet, and he looked up into Don Domingo's face for orders.

"You must go back to Bumblebee City," said the ferret. "You must take a message—a written one—to Chispa Chick. I am forced to play a hand I did not intend to play. It may not win, but I have to risk it."

"Write the message, captain," answered the waiting dwarf.

Don Domingo drew a memorandum from his pocket and tearing out a leaf wrote hastily across his knee a message like this:

"To CHISPA CHICK:—Under no circumstances is Mormon Paul to be dealt with according to your laws. The man belongs to me; and I will hold responsible the hands that shed his blood."

"DON DOMINGO,

"Monsieur Ledocq, of the Parisian Police."

Romeo took the message with a curious smile.

"What trail do you take?" he asked.

"Sybil's!" was the quick reply.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE MESSAGE FARED.

FIVE minutes later the cavern in the mountains was without a tenant.

Under the silver moon that hung pendent in the heavens two figures, contrasts in physique, had separated to pass out of sight in opposite directions.

They belonged to Don Domingo and Romeo.

The hermit dwarf had concealed in his bosom the message which he had been commissioned to carry to Bumblebee City and to place in Chispa Chick's hands at the earliest possible moment.

The detective's last injunction to Romeo was to urge speed, for he did not know what might occur to hasten the death of Mormon Paul who for more than a week had dwelt in the shadow of doom.

"Go straight to the mark like a well-aimed bullet," Don Domingo had said. "Let nothing, human or otherwise, stop you short of Chispa Chick. Your reward will come in the future, for the master you serve is able to pay."

Words of this sort were incentives enough to spur the messenger forward, and when the detective threw an anxious glance over his shoulder, a few seconds after uttering them, Romeo was already gone.

The hermit sport had not gone far before he became possessed with a burning desire to see what Don Domingo had written.

He stopped in the moonlight and drew it forth, and with the brilliant eyes he owned, read it through, line for line, without taking breath.

"I wonder if he thinks they will obey him?" exclaimed Romeo, looking up with a smile. "He has added another name to the one by which they know him, as if it would awe such men as Chispa Chick and his pards. My opinion is that Chispa will read the message, and then tear it to pieces. But we shall see."

Romeo's mountain abode was not more than two hours good journeying from the little capital of the Silver Hills.

He covered the distance in considerably less time than this, and soon found himself among the silent, spectral cabins of Bumble.

He passed near enough to Mormon Paul's prison to see the statuesque figures of the giant guards, looked in at Colorado Durg's "Hotel," without a guest now, and went on to Chispa Chick's cabin.

Before Romeo reached the door he saw beyond the threshold the striking form of the man he sought, but a moment later he noticed that Chispa Chick had company—another man.

This discovery was not to the hermit's notion, but he drew nearer, and uttered an ejaculation when he recognized Chispa's visitor.

It was Lucky Livingstone, of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

Romeo did not know that the sport of the rival camp had come back of his own accord, nor that he had unknowingly passed Dark Dave, Chispa's messenger, in the mountains.

He wished at that moment that Lucky Luke was on his own stamping-ground, for he did not want to deliver Don Domingo's letter in the presence of any one—especially not before Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

But what was he to do?

Impatient and fretful, the little man of the mountains paced up and down before the cabin, as he waited for Chispa's visitor to depart.

Ever and anon he threw glances beyond the cramped window, and secretly cursed Lucky Luke's staying qualities.

"I wish I could toss the sticking-plaster over the divide, and plump him down on his own soil!" cried Romeo, striking his fists together. "Don't I know that every moment of time is precious to Don Domingo? He wants Bumblebee City to know his ultimatum at once, and I promise to make it known. But who looked for a mountain lion in the way?"

At last Romeo's impatience got the better of him.

Shutting his teeth hard like a person who comes to a desperate conclusion under adverse circumstances, he thrust one hand into his bosom and strode to the door.

The next moment he had opened it and stood face to face with the two men.

"By the souls of the saints! there's your spy now!" cried Lucky Livingstone, as he caught sight of the unexpected and unsummoned opposition.

"Yes, gentlemen, I am here on business," said Romeo, advancing, but with his eyes fixed wholly on Chispa Chick.

Then he drew out the detective's message, and in an instant it fell upon the table in front of the boss of Bumblebee.

Chispa looked strangely at Romeo before he

ventured to possess himself of the paper, and as his hand touched it he asked:

"Who sent this?"

"It talks for itself," answered Romeo, somewhat haughtily, and at the same time stepping back to await results.

"He's on his dignity!" laughed Lucky Luke. "By Jove! he ought to serve a sultan, or a bey!"

Meanwhile, Chispa Chick had humored his desires by snatching up the paper, and Romeo saw him read it under the lamp.

Twice during the perusal the color of the Colorado changed.

"Hades and horns! did he send this?" suddenly yelled Chispa turning to Romeo who was waiting for an outburst of some kind.

"He sent it. I saw him write it on his knee."

Chispa Chick growled something unintelligible through his teeth, and tossed the message across the table toward the man from Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

Lucky Livingstone read it and laughed outright.

"That confirms what I told you days ago," Lucky Luke said, with a look at his companion.

"You will notice that he has added his old name to the message."

"I see. He calls himself Monsieur Ledocq of the French police," replied Chispa Chick.

"You will notice, too, that he calls the prisoner Mormon Paul after Romeo yonder has announced that the exiled priest is dead."

"I see that, also."

Lucky Livingstone tossed the message back to Chispa Chick, and silence fell between the two for a moment.

"Does he want an answer?" asked the Chick, addressing Romeo.

"He did not say."

"Then he expected obedience?"

"I think he did."

Once more Chispa Chick consulted his comrade with a look.

"You run this camp. I am nothing here," said Lucky Livingstone, answering the inquiring glance. "Don't mince matters. This man is an old fox. Give him a length and he'll have a mile before you know it."

"Is he really Monsieur Ledocq?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Why does he say that Mormon Paul belongs to him?"

"I presume because he has followed him for some crime."

"Before he became Mormon?"

"I think so."

"But he is our prisoner now!" cried Chispa Chick. "The hands of Don Domingo have not touched him."

"Certainly not."

"Then how dare he command us not to deal with our own catch according to our laws?"

Lucky Livingstone answered at first with a cool smile.

"These sleuths take a good deal of license. You know that you are not bound to obey the mandate Romeo has brought."

"I am bound to obey nothing from no living man!"

And the hand of Chispa Chick struck the table with a force that made the lamp dance.

"Take your message back to Don Domingo!" he continued, throwing a fierce look at Romeo. "No! I'll treat it as it deserves—thus! and thus!"

The heated hands of Chispa Chick tore the paper to fragments, and threw them in a shower at the little spectator who had witnessed the proceeding in silence but not without a half-formed smile of derision.

"You do not intend to obey Don Domingo?" asked Romeo, though Chispa's action had rendered the question superfluous.

"The message answers you," was the reply.

"Where is the sleuth-hound now?"

"I don't know."

"You left him—where?"

"In the mountains."

"Have you entered his employ? Are you in the service of the trail-dog who would cheat justice in Colorado by demanding the liberty of the meanest Mormon dog unbung? Go back to your master, Romeo. By George! we see you in your true light at last. You embraced the first opportunity that presented itself to ally yourself with the enemy!"

Although the burly figure of Chispa Chick towered above him like a volcano about to involve him in ruin, Romeo, the hermit dwarf, stood his ground like a man.

Lucky Livingstone contemplated the scene with one of his grim smiles.

"Is that all?" asked Romeo, at last, with a spice of humor in his voice.

"I should think it was enough," was the retort, and with this for a dismissal Chispa Chick turned to Lucky Luke and began to talk with him.

The little dweller in the mountains looked on for a moment longer, when, seeing that he was totally ignored, he left the two men to their own company.

"A cool reception and the teeth of a hyena," chuckled Romeo, when he reached the air beyond the cabin. "I've delivered the message, as I promised Don Domingo I would. Now, he

and Chispa Chick for it. If Bumblebee City chooses to think that the detective won't hold her pards responsible for the shedding of Mormon Paul's blood let them let it out. I've looked into some cool men's faces before, but the man who calls himself Monsieur Ledocq has one that charms me."

Romeo stood a short time in front of the cabin, then, with a glance at it over his shoulder, he walked away.

He did not expect to find Don Domingo at the cavern in the mountain, for as he knew the sleuth had thrown himself upon Sybil's trail, therefore he was not expected to hear Chispa Chick's mad response back to his starting-point.

He walked slowly through the camp, repassing Mormon Paul's prison and seeing the statuesque guards again.

Not far from the cabin he stopped and looked at it.

He thought of the questions Don Domingo had put concerning its guards and its lock.

"The Mormon is doomed," thought Romeo. "The two hot-heads back yonder—the fool of Deuce-o'-Diamonds and the Hotspur of Bumble—intend to make it war to the knife between themselves and Don Domingo. I don't want to be in the fight; but I won't turn against Monsieur Ledocq. I—"

A step behind Romeo kept the sentence unfinished, and before he could turn, he was caught in a merciless grip and lifted from the ground.

"You don't go back to your sleuth-hound of a master till we have dealt with Mormon Paul!" was hissed in his face. "Monsieur Ledocq, or Don Domingo, whichever name he likes best, threatens the wrong men when he throws a message like the one you bore into the teeth of united Bumblebee and Deuce-o'-Diamonds! Besides, my young atom, I think I owe you one anyhow," and Romeo felt the hand at his throat tighten till the world before him seemed to swim in darkness.

Before oblivion came he had recognized his persecutor, and knew that he had fallen into the hands of Lucky Livingstone of the camp just over the divide.

The hermit dwarf was not released until his enemy had burst open a cabin door, and then he fell like a corpse upon the floor of Chispa Chick's shanty.

"I'm for silencing 'em as we go!" laughed Lucky Luke. "That's a beginning!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A FIRM FAIR ONE.

DARK DAVE, the messenger across the "Divide," made good time between Bumblebee and Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

He was one of those who wanted speedy and summary vengeance to overtake Mormon Paul, for a little hatred rankled in his heart against the Saints.

He did not find Lucky Livingstone at home.

That individual had passed him somewhere on the trail, and his message intended for Lucky Luke was delivered to Solid Silver Dick.

"Something queer has come over the girl," Dick said, when he had learned that Hazel was wanted in Bumblebee City to bear witness against Mormon Paul. "She won't swear him into the noose if we take her there."

The announcement seemed to stagger Dark Dave.

"The Old Harry she won't!" he cried. "Didn't she tell Lucky Livingstone that she saw the choking at the sheds? That's the impression we've got at Bumble, anyhow."

"You shall see for yourself."

Solid Dick conducted Dark Dave through the first beams of morning to Hazel's snug cabin, and knocked gently.

In a moment the fair and smiling face of the girl appeared at the door, and the mountain men walked in.

The handsome sport of Deuce-o'-Diamonds acquainted Hazel with the purport of Dark Dave's mission, and a short silence fell over the little group.

"You will not go to the trail and leave me alone in the camp?" she said with a light expression.

"No, miss; you are to go with the rest," answered the messenger.

"Why?" cried Hazel. "Now that I have been rescued from the hands of the man you hold, I have no desire to encounter him again."

"But your testimony?" persisted Dark Dave as gently as possible. "It is the one thing we need at the trial."

"I have nothing to say."

The man from Bumble was taken aback at this reply calmly and resolutely spoken.

He could not help throwing a glance toward Solid Dick.

"You were with him the night he fled from Durg's Hotel?" said Dave returning to the subject.

"Unfortunately I was," and the girl's brow seemed to cloud at the recollection of the scenes through which she had passed.

"You saw the struggle at the sheds? You can tell—"

Hazel's hand was suddenly lifted and Dark Dave stopped in the midst of a sentence.

"As I have told you, I have nothing to say," resumed the girl.

"But you will go to Bumble?"

"You can take me, of course, but Chispa Chick will find me a very unwilling, if not a silent, witness."

Dark Dave was nonplused.

"What's come over the girl?" he hastened to ask when he and Solid Dick walked from the cabin.

The sport of Deuce-o'-Diamonds shook his head.

"Her tongue was loose enough just after the rescue, wasn't it?"

"She talked then."

"When did she become silent in this one particular?"

"Within the past forty-eight hours."

"Who has coached her?"

"No one. Who would?" and Solid Dick gave his companion a look of wonder.

The last words echoed in Dark Dave's mind, and only deepened the puzzle he had struck in the camp.

Not long afterward a company of men were ready to set out for Bumblebee City.

They were twenty in number and were headed by Solid Silver Dick.

The trial and death of Mormon Paul were events important enough to take them across the mountains.

"I don't like to go without the main witness," remarked Dark Dave as he joined Solid Dick.

"You can't take her," was the response.

The man from Bumblebee looked toward Hazel's abode, and bit his lip under the mustache which hid it.

"She would go anyhow if I bossed this ranch!" he grated. "I'd like to see any one—especially a girl—beat me in a matter of this sort. She's taken pity on the villain who was blighting her life, and, if the truth was known, maybe she doesn't thank the pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds for tearing them apart."

The speaker kept these conclusions so close that Solid Silver Dick heard nothing of them, and when the company marched from camp Hazel was left behind.

"They'll send for her if they conclude to use her testimony. Lucky Livingstone will decide this question, and if they want her I hope they'll send me back."

Dark Dave growled his disappointment for more than ten miles out of camp.

As for Hazel, she had watched the company pass her cabin to vanish in the canyon a short distance away.

Instead of quitting the little window alongside the door, she took a piece of paper from her bosom and read it over carefully without a motion of her lips.

She had not told a single man in Deuce-o'-Diamonds that during the night that same paper had fluttered from somewhere to the foot of her couch, neither had she let it be seen.

Of course a message from without was enough to startle her, but the contents of the paper made up a puzzle, the nature of which tended to the deepest mystery.

It was with eyes filled with amazement that the girl read in the first flushes of day the sentences of the mysterious paper, which ran thus:

"HAZEL:—Can you keep a still tongue in your head about the death of the spy at the sheds behind Captain Durg's Hotel? It will further the administration of long delayed justice if you will refuse to testify against the man called Mormon Paul at any hearing he may have before the pards of Bumblebee City. The exiled priest must open his mouth and throw light upon a great mystery before any rope strangles him. The hand that sends this is the hand which must right the infamous wrong done one of the most beautiful of your sex. With Mormon Paul dead in Bumble, the crime of another land will never be fully avenged. Therefore, I ask you to seal your lips—to have the courage to say 'no' to the Mormon's persecutors. Because he may live, rest assured that the hand of him who asks this favor of you will always be raised between you and Mormon captivity. Let right prevail though the guilty for a while enjoy the freedom of the eagle. Be firm, or betray me, as you wish; but for the sake of justice and vengeance, stand before the life-leeches of Bumblebee City with sealed lips."

There was not the semblance of a signature to the singular letter which had reached Hazel by some unseen hand.

A second reading had decided her, and a third had only emphasized her resolution.

She believed that it had not emanated from the mind of any citizen of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

She knew the universal sentiment that pervaded the camp.

Not a hand from Solid Dick's down would ever be lifted for the man who awaited his death across the mountains.

Hazel's resolve startled everybody in the camp.

Lucky Livingstone laughed when he heard it, and remarked that when the time came the girl would seal Mormon Paul's fate with eagerness. She was the only living witness of the murder and her testimony would be heard under the tree in the square at Bumblebee City whenever it was needed.

With the girl, as has been said, reposed the secret of the message which had decided her.

When she had read it over after the departure

of Solid Silver Dick and his comrades, she tore it into bits and forced them all between the logs of the cabin.

"The handwriting of the unseen person shall not compromise him!" exclaimed Hazel. "I may be dragged to Bumble despite the assurances of Solid I. k. Mormon Paul is the real exiled priest of the Church; he has committed crimes that justify his death, but the unknown would hold him off till something has been solved, and I will assist him. Justice delayed a little will not harm anything."

Meantime Bumblebee was eagerly waiting for the men from Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

The rough but serviceable fastenings on Mormon Paul's prison gave proof that the prisoner was still in the shadow of a mountain gallows.

The guards had been relieved at daylight, and others watched a cabin which did not seem to need any guard at all.

As the day advanced, anxious looks were thrown toward the mountains that rose between the two camps.

A certain rock that rose above the elevated trail like the battlements of a castle was the point most watched, for Dark Dave was expected to appear upon it and signal the approach of the band.

In one of the cabins not very far from Mormon Paul's, a little bundle of humanity occupied a bit of blanket which no imagination could twist into the dignity of a couch.

At first the looker-on would have supposed that the person was dead, but all at once the head moved back and a pair of eyes glittered like a basilisk's.

It was Romeo!

When he stretched his limbs and leaped up, it was seen that his hands were tied on his back.

A strong cord was passed around his wrists, and he was unable to lift a single hand above a certain line.

The window of the cabin was above Romeo's chin, but he could look out and see the cloudless sky that hung over the mountain camp—a boundless canopy of blue—through which far overhead swept now and then across his line of vision dark objects like floating ships.

The night of his capture and choking by Lucky Livingstone had passed, and another day had come.

Romeo's throat was still sore from the terrible grip of the un pitying hand.

He did not know that he owed his existence to Chispa Chick, who had commuted the sentence of death passed by Lucky Luke to incarceration in the cabin which was then his prison.

This had passed during his unconsciousness, and when he came out of the swoon he found himself bound and surrounded by four walls—a captive in Bumblebee City, where, instead of friends, he had now a legion of enemies.

Romeo burned to know what had happened since his unlucky adventure.

Had Mormon Paul been rescued, or had the noose of the pards of the Silver Hills settled the account vengeance held against him?

Romeo grew impatient and anxious.

He knew that Dark Dave had been sent to Deuce-o'-Diamonds to summon its pards to the trial, but he had no means of knowing whether or not they had arrived.

All at once a commotion was heralded by a number of shouts.

Romeo ran to the window.

He swore like a trooper as he tugged at his unyielding bonds.

The shouts died out as suddenly as they had been raised.

After a while a body of men passed the hermit sport's prison.

"Deuce-o'-Diamonds has come!" ejaculated Romeo.

Ten minutes later he heard other noises that riveted his attention.

There were curses, cries of rage and threats of vengeance.

A smile spread over Romeo's face.

"Mormon Paul is gone!" he cried.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BACK TRAIL.

WE transport the reader from the capital of Silver Hills to the mountains.

We leave Romeo listening to the vociferations of the men who tramp the dust of Bumble City while they jerk out their mad sentences for ears not refined.

It is night in the heart of the mountains, but a net-work of silver lies here and there on the ground, and touches the trees with fairy-like fingers.

The moon is at its full, and the night is as beautiful as night can come from the hand of the Creator.

Over a trail which winds in and out among the rough scenery, now skirting the ledge of appalling precipices, now losing itself deep in the numerous canyons and gulches that abound everywhere, ride two men side by side.

The reader has seen them before, and a second look will proclaim them the twain that came down upon Bumblebee and carried off Sybil the Nameless.

The woman is not with them.

Her absence signifies that she refused to take

the oath demanded of her, and that the men have carried out the terrible threat hissed forth by Silken Grip.

A day and part of a night have passed since we left the captors and their captive together.

"It was a long chase and for what?" suddenly laughs one of the couple, and as he speaks he throws a glance at his companion over whose dark face has settled an expression of sternness such as Sybil saw when she last beheld him.

"We have won!" was the answer. "Look back over our work and then ask yourself if we have failed."

"She did not take the oath!"

"No, and why not? The blood of her father was in her veins. When I gave her her choice, I knew she would not let one word of the oath pass her lips."

"She has the grit of a Spartan."

"It was not grit, Moro. It was supreme stubbornness. Besides that, Richard Redfire had given her hope. She believed that the detective—Monsieur Ledocq, we would call him—was equal to the emergency. He told her that he would cross the continent and put his hand on the mystery. What did he expect to find in this country I would like to know? He came from Paris once to find a man called Cartouche, and he is said to have lost the trail and the game in Colorado. Did he think that Cartouche is living?"

The man known as Moro shook his head.

"We have no positive proof of Cartouche's death; but we know enough," continued Silken Grip.

"I am almost as well satisfied of that event as though I had seen the bones of the captain with his name carved on every one."

"Then where did Richard Redfire expect to find his clew?"

"I am at fault."

For a few moments the two men rode on in silence, the occasional sounds of their horses' hoofs being the ones that disturbed the stillness of the hour.

They went down into a canyon like horsemen riding into the abode of darkness, and the vastness of the place swallowed them up.

At the further end of the canyon but one man appeared. He had left his companion behind.

The one who now rode ahead was Silken Grip, and when he had reached a level place he touched his steed with the spur and went off like the wind.

"The game is ended so far as our chase is concerned. We can go back now, and play the last hand in Paris the Magnificent. I did not expect the play to conclude among the mountains of the United States. If we had used our eyes to better advantage we might have finished it in New York, but before we could close in on her she was gone. Moro won't find anything if he does go back. He isn't well enough acquainted with the land to rediscover the place, and as to a disbelief in Cartouche's death—pshaw! it is the height of folly!"

These were the words thrown to the winds by Silken Grip the Man of Fate while he rode over the trail which the horse kept with wonderful pertinacity.

He laughed at the end of his words when he thought of the mission which had taken Moro his companion back through the canyon.

He was on the trail to Deuce-o'-Diamonds, but he turned aside and rode toward Denver many miles away.

"I will keep my promise with Moro," he went on after a brief silence. "I will wait two weeks in Denver for him. If he does not end the look in that time I will go East, and close up the whole business as I see fit. The detective is out of the way. My idea is that Richard Redfire found something out here that suited him much better than playing spy for a woman. He has doubtless discovered that the role of Monsieur Ledocq though generally successful in Paris fails on foreign soil. I would like to have another tilt with the sleuth of the boulevards and the sewers. We have met before, Richard, but then I was not Silken Grip, and you were Monsieur Ledocq!"

During this time Moro was riding back.

There was in the fellow's look an expression which the moon revealed.

He was as well built as Silken Grip; he had the penetrating black eyes, and the fine mustache of the Man of Fate, but he had none of his companion's display of security which he had just heard expressed in emphatic language.

"I think I am able to hold my own in this country," ejaculated Moro. "Silken Grip can go on to Denver and wait for me the allotted time. If I don't find anything here to suit me better, I will join him according to my word. But I want to know something. I don't believe that Captain Cartouche is dead, for I have heard several strange items of news since we left New York on Sybil's trail. Silken Grip may laugh and say that Cartouche is ready for resurrection, but I want to know it before I give in my acquiescence. What brought Richard Redfire to these parts if Cartouche is no more? It is the same old trail he lost in Colorado years ago when he followed his man from Paris. If he believed that man dead would he have taken up Sybil's cause? A thousand times no! I can

reach but one conclusion: The detective believes Cartouche alive, and somewhere, with the tenacity that made him famous in Paris, he is dogging a trail."

Moro spoke with the confidence of a man in his utterances.

All the time the distance between Silken Grip and himself was lengthening.

At last Moro drew rein at a spot where the mountain road seemed to divide.

The man looked puzzled.

"Which way did he come?" he asked himself. "If I was in a city, I would find the right way; but here I am at fault. A short stay in this country may make me perfect on the trail, for I have followed game through the forests that surround Paris. Ah! I will try this path."

Having made his choice, he pushed forward again, and ere long he descended the mountain to find himself riding through a piece of country over which the first light of a new day was diffusing itself.

Moro let his horse take his own gait, and as the sky brightened he studied the region into which he was riding deeper and deeper.

All at once the rider checked his animal and then leaned forward.

"That looks something like the place!" broke over his lips. "I know that objects seen at night have quite a different appearance by day. But there was a tree near the spot—a tree with a broken top like yon one, for I noticed it against the disk of the moon just before we abandoned her."

He continued to study the object he had discovered, and in a short time he was riding on, but once more gradually ascending the mountain, toward a giant tree whose top had succumbed to lightning or storm.

But once Moro looked over his shoulder, and then he saw a sight that held his attention for some time.

Some distance away, several miles or more, and far beneath him, he saw the grouped cabins of a camp.

"I am almost back in Bumblebee City!" he smiled. "With a few changes I would not be afraid to visit the place again. I wonder what the roughs have done with their Mormon prisoner? I heard something about him while I waited at the hotel for Silken Grip to bring Sybil down-stairs. The Coloradans don't like the Mormon buzzards very much. Well, 'tis little wonder. There was a little of the Mormon about Captain Cartouche. He always had more than one woman on his string."

Laughing over his last observation, Moro pursued his way to the tree, which he reached in a few minutes.

When he was near the gigantic trunk he smiled to himself, and then threw an inquisitive glance around.

"I am right! I can't be wrong, with my recollection of this tree to guide me," fell from his lips as he dismounted. "We were here last night. What are these. The tracks of three horses, as I live! Sybil was with us yet, but we got rid of her soon after we passed this tree. Now, if I can follow the trail we made last night, I will discover Silken Grip's secret."

Moro had keen eyes, and he knew how to use them.

Barely touching the bridle to keep his horse under control, he went up the trail that led past the tree.

He was looking for the trail which led to Sybil the Nameless—he, one of the men who had tracked her across the continent, and who had left her to inhabit a grave which, as Silken Grip had boasted, the Angel of the Resurrection should not find.

Moro had not turned traitor, but he wanted to know exactly what had become of Sybil, for there was a space of thirty minutes, during which time Silken Grip had dealt with her.

The hoof-prints of the three horses continued, until one was seen to drop out.

"Here is where I waited for him!" exclaimed Moro when he reached this spot. "He went off with Sybil; but he came back alone."

After awhile he went forward once more, examining the trail carefully as he proceeded.

The sleuth of the city was making a record in the mountains.

At last Moro stood still on a certain spot.

The hoofprints did not go further; two horses had stood where he was.

On either side rose trees and rocks in mingled confusion. Here and there only the sunlight touched the ground. It was a wild, weird spot.

Moro looked ahead, but saw no tracks. He moved forward again, but stopped after ten steps, and sent a curse through his teeth.

The trail was lost!

CHAPTER XIX.

LUCKY LIVINGSTONE'S GRUDGE.

As completely as though there never had been a footstep where he had halted, the trail he had been following had disappeared.

Moro dropped the rein he had held till that moment and renewed his search, but to his infinite chagrin he could not find a single track.

"I didn't think Silken Grip, the French fox, could play it this well," he murmured. "He must have been taken up into the air with his

prisoner. Surely he did not go forward on the ground. Well, if I have lost Sybil the Nameless, I can look after Cartouche."

Moro went back to his horse with deep disappointment written on his face.

At that moment he would have given a great deal to have solved the mystery that shrouded Sybil's fate.

Slowly he went down the mountain, and back over the trail that led toward Bumblebee City which he had seen from the elevated path.

Guiding his horse to one side at a certain spot, Moro drew from an inner pocket a set of false whiskers which he adjusted to his face.

The change was startling, and he no longer resembled the man who had assisted in the abduction of Sybil from Durg's Hotel.

Thus changed, he rode into the mountain camp.

Bumble was still in a furor.

Here and there groups of men stood and talked like fellows out of humor.

Moro came in for his share of scrutiny as he rode forward, and hardly had he drawn rein ere he was surrounded.

Did he come over the winding trail? Had he seen any one among the mountains? And did that person try to avoid him like a man fleeing from justice?

Moro smiled at the fire of questions; he could not help it.

It did not take the pards of Bumble long to make him acquainted with the last startling event of camp life.

A prisoner under sentence of death had made his escape.

A Mormon, who had killed one of the citizens of Bumblebee, had secretly tunneled from his prison to beneath the puncheon floor of another shanty, from which he had left camp with the stealth and coolness of a finished desperado.

Yes, Mormon Paul had burrowed through the earth like a mole, but with more foresight than is possessed by that animal, and while the men of the Silver Hills camp were standing guard with keen senses on the alert, he was at large.

Moro, with his identity undiscovered, thanks to the false beard and a few changes in his dress, listened to the story of the Mormon's crime and escape with more interest than he openly displayed.

"That's a man who knows more than any of us about the Mormon!" cried a tough, as the figure of Lucky Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds appeared at the door of Colorado Durg's Hotel.

"Who is he?" asked Moro.

"It is Lucky Luke from across the divide. He's the man what gave the Saint away in Deuce-o'-Diamonds, when he was making off with his girl-wife."

The following moment Lucky Livingstone came forward, and a remark brought him face to face with Silken Grip's pard.

"You did not see the sneaking dog in the mountains?" he asked, addressing Moro.

"I did not."

Was it the voice or the look of the speaker that seemed to open Livingstone's eyes wider than they usually were?

"You came down the hills, did you not?"

"I did."

"Then I would like to see you."

Side by side the two men walked into the hotel, and Lucky Luke, with a glance at Durg, led Moro to the little room at the head of the stair which had been occupied by Hazel and the Nameless.

"You don't hide your voice very well," laughed Luke, holding out his hand as he turned upon Moro with a smile at his mouth and a merry twinkle in the depths of his eyes.

Moro looked strangely into the face before him, and hesitated to take the hand.

"Come! we were comrades once. Why break the old friendship now?" continued Livingstone. "Let me break the suspense. I am Blankmere!"

The name had a marvelous effect on Moro. He went back as though a dagger had flashed in his face, but in a moment he was squeezing Livingstone's hand and giving vent to ejaculations of pleasure.

"I thought I saw the work of an old hand in the running off of Captain Durg's guest," resumed Lucky Luke. "What have you done with the woman?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean you do not know?"

"That is it exactly."

"Ah, then, your partner was at the head of the affair."

Moro bowed.

"Who is he?"

"Silken Grip."

Lucky Livingstone looked puzzled.

"Did you think he was Cartouche?" asked Moro.

The answer was a laugh.

"He could not be Cartouche. I knew that," Luke of Deuce-o'-Diamonds said. "I am no longer Blankmere, the fellow who used to enjoy the treasures of your side-board when you were not catching women in America. I am now Lucky Livingstone and have been that per-

sonage for years. I think I can give you a bit of news which might cause surprise."

"Let me have it."

"Well, Monsieur Ledocq is in Colorado."

Moro smiled as if he had expected something of the kind.

"You don't start," exclaimed Livingstone.

"No. I was prepared."

"Then, what if I should say that Cartouche is living?"

"Neither would that knock me down," laughed Moro.

Lucky Livingstone leaned back in his chair and gazed at his companion in blank astonishment.

"I am not going to announce that Cartouche is among us," continued Lucky Luke after a moment's silence. "You know what brought Monsieur Ledocq or Don Domingo into this country."

"Yes; Sybil sent him."

"Sybil?" echoed Livingstone. "Who is Sybil?"

"The woman who rode out of camp a few hours ago between Silken Grip and myself."

"I am mystified. On what sort of errand could she send the detective across the continent?"

"Will you growl if I say that I am not permitted to go into particulars?"

"Certainly not, Moro. Every man keeps his own secrets. That is right. But Sybil sends Monsieur Ledocq after a mystery, you say?"

"She does."

"She could not have sent a better, a more persistent trail dog. You recollect how he ran men down in Paris. Why, there was no quarry he did not catch—"

"Until he lost Cartouche whom he followed to America," finished Moro with a smile.

"So he did lose the clever fellow—the Satan of rogues—the man of many disguises and innumerable loves!"

"He lost him completely, and somewhere in this country," added Moro. "There is a belief abroad that Cartouche is dead. Silken Grip holds firmly to it."

"What do you think?"

"I don't give him up."

"He is not dead. A rascal like Cartouche seldom dies a natural death. He gets the penalty at last. Let me tell you, Moro. I have been more than ten years in this country. There isn't a drop of French blood in my veins, though I played Frenchman fairly well over sea. I have seen all the ups and downs of mining life since I struck the Wild West. I have been nabob and beggar within a week, and yet I am called Lucky Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds. Between you and I, Monsieur Ledocq wants me nearly as badly as he thinks he wants Cartouche. Don't start as if I were unraveling some skein of crime, for I am doing nothing of the kind. When I saw Don Domingo here in Bumblebee City, I saw Monsieur Ledocq, the American sleuth of the French police. I told Chispa Chick as much, and if the sleuth had been here when Mormon Paul escaped, there would have been a fight to the death, or a square back-down. And there is not much danger that it would have been a back-down. You know the man."

"There isn't a drop of coward blood in Ledocq's veins. I give him that credit," answered Moro.

"He wanted the Mormon to go unhung," Lucky Livingstone went on after a short pause. "The message he sent into camp by Romeo, the hermit sport of the mountains was torn up by Chispa Chick, and the little Mercury was severely handled and taught that we intend to stand no foolishness. Now, if Don Domingo is on an old trail, despite the fact that Sybil sends him across the continent, is he not after his old quarry—Cartouche?"

"That is it!" exclaimed Moro. "Monsieur Ledocq never gives a man up."

"He lost Cartouche five years ago. Where has he been all this time?"

"He has lived a life of ease in New York."

"And it only wanted a woman to start him back to the old life, eh?"

"That was all."

"I'm glad she started him!" smiled Lucky Livingstone. "He may give me something to do."

"You?" ejaculated Moro.

"Yes."

"I don't understand."

"Then know that one of my dreams has been to get even with the detective—to square accounts with the human ferret against whom I once swore my life, thousands of miles from here and under circumstances I need not mention. I had the captain at my mercy when he was masquerading here as Don Domingo. I could have shot him dead in his tracks, and my fingers itched to do it. But I want first to tell him who I am; to throw into his teeth the reason for my vengeance, and then to finish forever the man who had no mercy when, for the first time in all my life I asked for it."

Moro listened to this speech to the close without an interruption.

The face of Lucky Luke underwent a change as he spoke.

"If he does not come back to look after his

friend, the Mormon, who played mole and gave us the slip, I shall take to the trail myself," Livingstone resumed. "I will spread about this ferret, shrewd though he be, a net whose meshes I learned to weave in the French capital. I know the mountains of Colorado as a man knows his own house."

"Are there caverns in the mountains—secret and mysterious caves?" asked Moro, with eagerness.

"There are scores of such places, but I know them all."

"Do you know a gigantic tree with a broken top? It must be five miles from camp. It stands where the trail skirts the top of a rough ledge."

"I know the tree. The Headless Giant we call it."

Moro's excitement betrayed him.

"Is there a cave near the tree?" he asked.

"Yes, two of them. One I would defy the eagle to find."

"That is the one I want to explore."

"You?" cried Lucky Luke. "In heaven's name, what do you expect to find there?"

"Never mind. You said awhile ago that a man had a right to his secrets. I hold you to that, Lucky Livingstone. Give me a diagram of the route leading to the cavern, and I will leave you here to wait for Don Domingo, alias Monsieur Ledocq."

"You shall have the map. But answer one question. Why do you think the detective wants Mormon Paul?"

Moro shook his head.

"Do you think that the exiled priest of the Church is the great Cartouche?"

Moro almost left his chair.

"Heavens! I never thought of that!" he cried.

CHAPTER XX.

ROMEO'S TRIGGER.

WHETHER or not there were grounds for the suspicions which Lucky Luke had raised in Moro's mind concerning the man known as Mormon Paul, there was certainly a reason for believing that Don Domingo's hunt was connected in some manner with him.

At the moment when the two men whom we have just left were discussing the situation in the upper room of Durg's Hotel, the fugitive from Colorado justice was lengthening the distance between himself and the enemy.

Mormon Paul had planned and executed a very ingenious escape.

With no help but a piece of scrap-iron which chance or fortune had thrown into his hands, he commenced the circumscribed tunnel which was to conduct him to liberty.

The blankets which composed his cot served to shield his progress from the vigilant eyes of his guards, who looked for no attempts of the kind.

Hour after hour, when the stalwart sentries thought him sound asleep, the prisoner prosecuted his work.

It was slow and tiresome, but the man was working in the shadow of a halter, and his mind was centered on freedom—freedom and vengeance.

He measured the length of his tunnel with his eye, and when he dug upward and touched the bottom of a puncheon floor he knew he had not toiled in vain.

For him to emerge from the underground corridor into the darkness of the cabin, and then to leave it quietly, occupied but a few moments and the figure that stole from Bumblebee City had the noiseless step of the fugitive, and the eye of a hunted quarry.

Only once did Mormon Paul stop within a mile of the camp, and then he stood for a few seconds on a boulder and hissed forth breathings of future retribution.

"They think I am harmless because the hand of both Mormon and Gentile is against me!" he exclaimed. "Let the fools of the Silver Hills learn that they have merely scotched the snake. Mormon Paul am I? There was a time when I had another name. I added power to it then, and I can go back to it now, and teach my enemies the bitterest lesson of their lives."

Springing from the rock, he turned his back upon Bumble, and the mountains took him up and seemed to lose him to mortal sight.

The Mormon had effected a miraculous escape, for if he had remained in prison, the arrival of the pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds would have soon been followed by the death of the man whose blood they wanted.

Chispa Chick was the coolest man in Bumblebee City.

The Mormon's escape drew from him no oaths and not a single threat.

He looked into the tunnel by which the Saint had crept to freedom, and smiled.

"It confirms one thing," said he. "The man is Mormon Paul," and then he walked away and shut the door of his shanty behind him.

Within the next hour he issued an order that restored Romeo to liberty.

The bonds of the hermit sport were cut, and he was ordered to report at Chispa's cabin.

"You have heard the news, I presume?" said the Chick as Romeo crossed his threshold and waited for him speak.

The little man bowed.

"Don Domingo did not have a hand in this rescue," continued Chispa. "I give Mormon Paul credit for a neat little job."

"It was real neat if I was correctly informed," answered Romeo with a smile.

"Don Domingo need not have made the demand. If he wants the Saint he can look for him elsewhere."

"Which he may do," put in the hermit.

Chispa Chick studied the hermit sport a little while with an interest which the surprised Romeo could not fathom.

"Look here, Romeo," suddenly cried Chispa. "What are you to get for serving the sleuth who is playing a shrewd hand among the Silver Hills?"

Romeo eyed the speaker with an expression of astonishment about his lips.

"Don't tell me you are not in his employ," was the quick continuance. "It is all right, Romeo. Serve any master you please, but remember—serve but one at a time."

The hermit was on his feet, and in a moment he was touching Chispa Chick on the shoulder with one of his yellow fingers.

"If I serve Don Domingo, do I make an enemy of Captain Chispa?" he asked.

"Not necessarily so, Romeo," was the quick retort, accompanied by a twinkle which the hermit of the hills did not expect to meet with at that time. "Let me give you a bit of advice. If you serve the detective, serve him well. Don't let anything tempt you to betray him. Be a true friend—a faithful servitor. It don't pay to turn traitor."

"A thousand thanks, Chispa," replied Romeo. "If I serve the sleuth, I make an enemy of Bumble."

"A bitter, uncompromising foe!" cried Chispa.

"Don Domingo is regarded as the friend of Mormon Paul. Not ten men in this camp believe that he had any right to ask us to hold our hands from the Saint. The man called Lucky Livingstone will not stop short of the detective's head. It is an old grudge—a vengeance that has slept. There is now organizing in Bumblebee City a secret cabal against Don Domingo. It will listen to nothing in extenuation of the sleuth's actions. I tell you, Romeo, you have chosen a new master in a bad time. But stick to him. As I have said, serve Don Domingo with all the zeal of a faithful slave. The time may come when you will need the strong arm and the cool head of the human ferret who has crossed the continent for his man."

The brilliant little eyes of Romeo were riveted on Chispa Chick when the boss of the Silver Hills concluded.

"Don't stay here. Get out of camp secretly and soon," resumed Chispa.

At the same time he held out his hand and the hermit sport put his own into it.

"Shall I mention the cabal to the detective when I see him?" he ventured with a glance into Chispa's eyes.

"Tell him everything. Tell him, too, that the game he is playing is a cool one among men just as brave as himself. He is known as Monsieur Ledocq, the famous American lynx of the French police, and say, if you like, Romeo, that Chispa's opinion is that at last he has found his match."

The two hands fell apart, and the little man went to the door.

"Good-by," said he from the threshold as he waved Chispa Chick an adieu. "May we never meet as foes. You carry in your breast a heart as big as a mountain pine."

"Never mind that, Romeo," laughed Chispa. "We are quite likely to meet as enemies. If we do I promise nothing. Good-by."

The door shut and Romeo was gone.

"A funny little compound of spirit and oddities," muttered Chispa Chick. "Romeo has enlisted in Don Domingo's cause, and when the boys suspect that they will include him in the proscribed. I don't know what the next move will be, but of one thing I am certain: Richard Redfire, the detective, has the chances against him. We don't like the craft anyhow, but for him to demand as his prey a man whom we had sentenced to death—that turns against him the banded pards of Colorado. If he walks back here he enters a den of lions which all the powers that be could not keep off. But will he come back? I think not. He will learn from Romeo that his prey is at large, and instead of playing another hand here he will follow the trail which the Mormon will make."

Already Romeo was trying to quit the camp without exciting suspicion.

He had the advice of Chispa Chick ringing in his ears, and he knew besides that his continued presence in Bumblebee City would only serve to raise the mountain toughs against him.

He had almost left the camp when a voice called his name.

Romeo did not appear to heed the call.

It was repeated louder and harsher than before and in tones which dared not be disobeyed.

With compressed lips and a resolution to face the worst, the hermit sport halted and turned.

"The man I don't want to see," passed through Romeo's thought. "He is making himself almighty fresh for an outsider. Give him

string, and he will overthrow Chispa Chick in ten days. I don't like Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds!"

Romeo watched the man who came toward him with a darkened brow, and with evil in his eyes.

Already he had felt his fingers at his throat, and he had no desire to feel them there again.

"We want you awhile longer," exclaimed Lucky Luke when twenty feet still separated him from Romeo.

The look that accompanied the words made the little hermit recoil.

"Ha! don't run there! I've got the same fingers I had some time ago."

"Great heavens! I don't want to feel them again!" thought Romeo, and then he added fiercely: "And, by Jupiter! I don't intend to!"

The succeeding moment he threw up one hand and shouted to the sport bearing down upon him:

"Hold! We can talk with ten feet between us, Lucky Luke."

"We talk closer than that, my little Satan with the evil eye! Stand where you are, or, by my life, I'll show you the silken grip of the Parisian tiger!"

That was enough for Romeo.

He bounded back several feet, then, with a movement totally unexpected by Lucky Livingstone, he drew a derring, and thrust it forward with a tigerish little laugh.

The man from Deuce-o'-Diamonds stopped and his hand went quickly to his belt.

"A double game with pistols for two, is it?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, for two!" came through the teeth of Romeo.

The next second there rung out a shot, a puff of smoke curled above the nozzle of the hermit's leveled revolver, and the man who staggered away, spun entirely around and then dropped heavily.

Romeo looked at his victim for a second, and then turned his back on the camp.

"My first man!" said he. "From this hour I am the hunted prey of two camps. Chispa Chick meant more than he said when he told me that the time would come when I will need the hand and head of Don Domingo. I need them now!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NOCTURNAL TRAIL.

ROMEO did not wait to be arrested for his snap-shot, which he believed had finished the career of Lucky Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

A sight of the stalwart figure lying motionless on the ground was enough for the hermit dwarf, and in a little while he was in full flight.

When he halted and looked back he was among the elevated trails, and Bumblebee City was many feet beneath.

He went back to his hidden cavern, but did not tarry there.

If he had killed Lucky Luke, the mountains would be scoured for him by a band of desperate men, and his known haunts would afford no protection.

He was anxious to find Richard Redfire, but if the detective was still searching for the trail of the men who had netted Sybil, success did not stare him in the face.

As for the sleuth, he was at that time some distance from the hermit sport, and when Romeo left his cave he did not turn toward Don Domingo.

Moro had completely lost the trail which he had followed, as we have seen, beyond the Headless Giant; but he had taken hope from Lucky Livingstone's words.

With the map of the route to the secret caverns near the tree, he believed that he could find Sybil, whose fate was to him a mystery and a desire.

Had the beauty of the Nameless attracted Moro? Had he followed her across the sea with Silken Grip to save her instead of silencing her forever?

His companion had gone to Denver, where he would wait a fortnight for him.

Moro smiled to himself when he thought of this.

If he could not find Sybil, or if the mystery of Cartouche remained unsolved, he would join Silken Grip.

If not, what?

To tell the truth, Moro hardly knew.

It was the night after Romeo's sudden flight from Bumblebee City.

A man well-mounted rode from the camp, and took the trail that led past the topless tree. It was Moro.

He had selected night for his expedition for several reasons, and now doubly armed, for he carried near his heart a certain paper, he had gone back to the trail lost a short time before.

He did not draw rein till he reached the tree itself.

Overhead hung a full moon that showered a lot of silver light about his horse's feet, and Moro could look some distance ahead when the moving boughs or the shadows of rocks did not obstruct his vision.

"A last look to get the thing fixed firmly in

my mind," said Moro aloud as he drew a paper forth. "Lucky Livingstone kept his word and I have the key to the secret caverns beyond this tree. If Silken Grip left Sybil in one of them, I will find her, and then—Then, by my soul! I will win more than I bargained for."

The lines on the paper had been traced in ink, and Moro's eyes could make them out without the help of any artificial light.

He studied the map closely for some moments.

"I have it now, I think. The one point that bothered me looks clear enough. I turned back from the very threshold of the first cavern when I was here before. If I can find Sybil I don't care whether our old Captain Cartouche is alive or dead, though, for safety, I'd rather have him underground. Can it be that Mormon Paul is Cartouche, the man the detective lost in this country years ago? Stranger things than that have happened. If Cartouche and Mormon Paul are one, why has the game for the millions been abandoned?"

Moro dropped to the ground as he finished and took the bridle of his steed.

"Just one moment, captain," said a voice, and the hand of Moro went like a thought to his revolver.

"Don't touch the dropper. The results might be unpleasant," was the continuance, and Moro stood face to face with a man whose hand dropped lightly upon his shoulder.

"I don't know you," exclaimed Moro looking into the eyes that seemed to study him with intense curiosity.

"We may become acquainted before we are done with each other," was the answer. "You did not go on with your partner?"

Moro said nothing, and his stubbornness brought a smile to the other's lips.

"You are Moro—Moro, the once Nabob on a small scale of the Rue La Pite."

An exclamation broke over Moro's tongue.

"Then, you are—"

"Monsieur Ledocq, the American who served on the French police when you were playing some brilliant games in the dark. I used to run you from shelter to shelter, keeping you in hot water, as we say, but never landing you in the cage. You played a sleek game with Silken Grip in Bumblebee City. A cool game, too, I call it. Didn't the victim resist, Moro?"

"No," confessed the astonished man before he thought, and then he flushed when he recalled his reply.

"She was probably too much surprised," smiled the detective. "It was a *coup* worthy of the head that conceived it. You turned back after you disposed of Sybil. Are you looking for the old captain, Moro?"

"The old captain?" was the echo.

"For Cartouche," laughed the sleuth.

"Is he here?"

The very tones in which this question was asked were ludicrous.

Richard Redfire looked at Moro in doubt whether he was in earnest.

"I am not on Cartouche's trail," Moro replied.

"I don't know what has become of the man."

"I don't see where your eyes have been. You have just left Bumblebee City?"

"I have."

"What have they done with Mormon Paul?"

"Nothing. He did it all himself."

The detective's look was a pointed interrogative.

"He got away," added Moro.

"Escaped?"

"Yes—tumbled out like a mole."

"Who helped him?"

"No one."

Richard Redfire was silent for a moment.

"Do you mean to insinuate that Mormon Paul is Cartouche?" exclaimed Moro.

"I said nothing of the kind. What put that into your head?"

Moro thought of Lucky Livingstone's suggestion, but did not mention it.

"The Mormon proved a Tartar in the hands of the toughs of Bumblebee City," the sleuth remarked. "I presume they wish now they had executed him a week ago."

"It wouldn't be to his advantage if the play was to be gone over."

"I don't doubt you, Moro. Now let us get down to business. You were on your way to Sybil."

"I?" cried Moro, starting back, but not beyond the reach of the detective's hand.

"Yes; you were seeking the woman you stole from Durg's at the muzzle of the revolver. What was that you were talking about while you consulted the paper you took from your bosom awhile ago?"

Moro saw that he was entrapped by a man who, in cunning and coolness, was more than his match.

He knew, too, that a lie would not go far with Richard Redfire, for he had seen the man tried in lands beyond the sea.

It was true, as Moro could recall without difficulty, that he had been bounded by the sleepless eye of the American sleuth from pillar to post in Paris.

More than once Richard Redfire, in his role of Monsieur Ledocq, had thrown himself between him and success, and a thousand times

almost he had tried, but in vain, to overcome the shrewdness of the human shadow.

"If he finds Sybil, it will not be a lasting success," thought Moro. "Silken Grip will turn on him; he will have the toughs of Deuce-o'-Diamonds and Bumblebee City at his heels, and in this country they shoot men on sight. The odds are fairly against Monsieur Lidocq. He can't win, even if he finds Sybil."

Moro made no reply to the detective's last words, but drew forth Lucky Luke's diagram and placed it in his hands.

"Who drew this map?" asked Richard, with a glance at the paper.

"Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds."

"The man of luck, eh?" was the answering ejaculation. "You know him, Moro? The strangest part of this trail is, that I should meet here in the heart of the continent some of the very ferrets and foxes of the old gang that used to give me employment in Paris. A singular fate has brought us together in Colorado. Isn't it strange, Moro?"

"I had not thought of it."

"Too much on your mind for that? Well, we will let fate take its course. This diagram shows the trail to Sybil?"

"I don't know."

"Did she take the oath?"

"No."

"Then you silenced her?"

"I had no hand in it."

"Ah! Silken Grip did the work."

"He did it all," replied Moro. "Whatever was done with the woman, Captain Redfire, was done by my companion. I mean, of course, all that transpired after we took her from the hotel. Lucky Livingstone has given me a diagram to some of the secret caves that exist in this vicinity. He does not know what became of Sybil. It was in her power to free herself with a word."

"If she would but take the oath."

"That was all we required of her."

"All!" laughed the detective. "You were asking a great deal—entirely too much for Sybil to submit to. She will die before the oath passes her lips."

Five minutes later the two men were walking side by side over the trail that plunged deeper into the wilderness of rock and tree as they proceeded.

Each watched the other covertly but intently and few words were exchanged.

All at once Richard Redfire halted and took the diagram from his pocket.

Holding it in one hand, he struck a match with the other, and held it over the paper.

"We are here!" exclaimed the detective, looking suddenly at Moro. "The wide line of Livingstone's map stops right here."

"I see no cavern," said Moro, with a smile.

"Nor do I, but it must be near. Let us see whether Silken Grip left a trail when he departed."

The American sleuth struck a second match and walked to the left.

Holding it near the ground where two huge boulders stood almost together, he looked a while, and then threw a look at the man who was watching him like a hawk.

"We'll have to thank Lucky Luke's map," said he.

In a moment Moro was at his side.

"What! have you found the trail?" he cried.

The detective pointed at the ground.

The little light thrown out by the match was enough to show Moro the foot-track which had been discovered at the foot of the stone.

The two men looked on in silence a few moments.

Moro's heart seemed to reach his throat at a single bound.

He should have discovered the trail alone. The eye of the ferret of two worlds should not have found it at all.

The thought sent a tide of blood through Moro's brain.

"By the living God! I am the man to check the shadow before he wins the game over us all!"

All at once Moro glanced at Richard Redfire, and then with the rage of a tiger he threw himself upon him and forced the detective against the stone!

It was the work of a second, and the detective had two demon hands at his throat before he could catch his thoughts!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET CAVERN.

"My time is now or never!" thought Moro, as he exerted all his strength to throttle the man who had crossed the continent on a mysterious mission. "This is the ferret I used to have at my heels in Paris. A thousand times have I longed for a chance to get even with him, and if I neglect this opportunity I deserve to fail forever."

Richard Redfire had been taken unawares.

The sudden *coup* would have amazed the most vigilant, and Moro, who possessed the agility of the cat had his man at a disadvantage before he could fairly take in the situation.

But the detective was not going to submit to

a choking, just because he was apparently at the mercy of the man who gripped him.

The unyielding stone was at the ferret's back, and the strength of Moro, as he madly exerted it, appeared to crush his skull from behind.

It was an awful moment in Richard's life.

"Lost in Paris forty times, but found in America!" broke over Moro's lips when he thought he was about to finish the man in his clutches.

Throttled as he was, the detective could not reply; but his silence did not prevent him from using his hands.

His arms were equally as long as Moro's, and when his hands flew to his own rescue, his assailant discovered that he had attacked no mean foe.

In a moment Moro's hands were forced loose, he was thrown back half-way across the trail by a power for which he had not prepared, and ere he could draw, Richard Redfire was holding him in a grasp as tight as his own!

"We turn the tables sometimes!" laughed the detective. "Yes, Moro, you have found in America the man you and your gang of secret scoundrels used to lose in Paris. I am nearly as familiar with the secrets of these mountains as I am with the haunts of the old capital. I lost Cartouche in this country a few years ago; but let me tell you that I have picked up the old thread and that I hold the skein in my hands now. Which shall it be, Moro, life or death? You never committed that one crime which sends men to the scaffold; but more than once you have stood in the shadow of murder. I don't want your life. You were not born for a thoroughpaced villain like Cartouche, nor for a cool rascal like Silken Grip. But you would have choked me to death awhile ago, and why? In the first place, you don't like Monsieur Ledocq, and then you don't want me to find Sybil."

Moro's look was answer enough. "If I let you go, what will you do?" continued the sleuth.

"I make no promise," growled Moro.

"Stubborn, eh? A man in your fix can't afford to show his teeth like a wolf."

"I am no wolf."

"No, merely a chained fox for the present. What will you do if I take off my hands?"

"Try me."

"Hol! you leave it all with me, do you?"

"Yes."

For a moment longer Richard Redfire held his man in a grip of steel, then he suddenly loosened his hands and Moro fell back.

"Yonder runs the trail," exclaimed the detective pointing toward the pathway which lost itself among the shadows a few yards away.

"You may seek Silken Grip and tell him that Monsieur Ledocq his old trailer is on the trail again, that he will not turn back till he has solved and punished."

"In God's name what do you want to know?"

"Never mind."

"If you seek any secret Cartouche may have held, you will seek in vain."

"I will answer that by and by," cried Richard.

"Do you expect to clear up the mystery that surrounds Sybil's life?"

"Ah! there you have hit it, Moro! The crime which made that woman nameless shall be made to speak. When the end comes the lips of Cartouche will have told the story of the past."

"I would like to see a dead man talk."

"A dead man! You shall see greater things than that before the game is out!" exclaimed the detective. "Go back to your companion if you wish to follow his fortunes. This is my battleground."

"And it may be the sepulcher of the American ferret."

"If it becomes such, then are you an excellent prophet, Moro!" laughed Richard. "You know where your horse is—at the Headless Giant."

"I don't go for fear of you," cried Moro. "I am not the man to thank you for what you would call your mercy. I had you by the throat a while ago. I saw in you the shadow that dogs men everywhere they go, and but for your sudden success I would have throttled you like a dog. No thanks, I say, Richard Redfire, as they call you in America. The time may come when you will curse the mercy that prompted you to spare the life of Moro."

The last word died out down the trail and the speaker disappeared while the final echoes touched the detective's ear.

"I've heard the fellow's threats before," muttered Richard. "The mysterious letters I used to find under the door of my lodgings across the ocean came from the hand I have just felt at my throat. A barking dog bites sometimes, Moro; but my parting advice to you is: Don't be too eager to show your teeth!"

The American detective turned back to the rocks where he and Moro had struggled for the mastery.

He still possessed the diagram in ink which he had taken from his late antagonist, and he was not long finding the tell-tale footprint in the soil.

But the rocks seemed solid, and Richard was

nonplused, while he used several matches in vain attempts to trace the foot-track to its starting point.

It was certain that Silken Grip had not moved the tremendous boulder in order to find the cave in which he had undoubtedly left Sybil the Nameless to some terrible fate.

The detective noticed at last that the top of the boulder projected some inches from the mountain wall.

In an instant he had reached up and caught the edge with both hands, and then he drew his body upward with the nimbleness of a monkey.

When Richard reached the apex of the boulder he found himself looking down into a dark place which he could not fathom with his arms.

Here was one of the secret caverns of the Silver Hills, and one which the eye of a lynx could hardly discover.

The detective had recourse to his matches again.

He struck another and sent it spinning down through the darkness, a miniature torch or ball of fire.

It seemed to strike ground about six feet below his position, and the flame shooting up with considerable brilliancy revealed walls of rock and a little plot of ground.

As the fire went out, the American sleuth lowered himself along the inside wall of the boulder and dropped to the ground below.

In a moment he was surrounded by stygian darkness, and ten steps from the spot where he alighted he found himself in a cavern whose walls he could not touch with his extended hands.

"I am here to find Sybil, and nothing must turn me back!" exclaimed the detective. "Alive or dead, the woman who was foully wronged in her cradle must be found, and the mystery made clear. If Mormon Paul has escaped, so much the better. He probably got away before Romeo delivered my demand. He will doubtless show a cool hand at Deuce-o'-Diamonds, where his beautiful victim is, for ten to one that Mormon Paul has not given up the girl they took from him at the muzzle of the revolver."

The Yankee sleuth found one of the walls of the corridor which he had reached, and it was followed until he halted and wondered if the cavern extended into the heart of the earth.

Here and there were narrow passages leading off from the main one, but they had not captured the detective.

An hour after his drop from the top of the boulder, Richard Redfire was still in the cavern, and in the midst of darkness as dense as that of a tomb.

All at once the corridor terminated.

The detective, who was looking for nothing of the kind, lost his footing and clutched madly at the wall for salvation.

But in vain!

He fell over the end of the passage with a cry which the very horror of his situation forced from his throat, and when he struck—he knew not how far beneath—he pitched forward and fell heavily on a floor of stone.

For several minutes the sleuth lay stunned and half-conscious on the ground.

When he rose to his feet he slowly collected his thoughts, and went to work again.

A few bunched matches made a respectable torch, which showed Richard that he had reached a chamber that seemed to have been hewn from the solid rock.

There were marks on the walls like those made by miners' picks, but the detective knew that time and nature had formed them all.

"The trail! the trail!" suddenly cried the man who was moving his little light over the ground.

"This is not the same footprint I found before the rock. That one was Silken Grip's, this is the track of Sybil the Nameless!"

It was not a striking clew that the American ferret had found—only the faint impress of a little shoe in the dust on the cavern floor—but it was enough.

It sent the blood leaping hot through Richard Redfire's veins.

The track in the dust was worth more to him than a diamond.

He followed it with the eye of a greyhound; here was another, a little fainter than the first, and here was a third.

Presently the detective entered a passage in which he could not stand erect.

The trail led on, deeper and deeper among the mysteries of that wonderful underground world.

He stopped at last in the midst of almost unendurable heat.

He seemed to be approaching some furnace whose fires were hidden, yet whose awful, blasting heat was sufficient to destroy human life.

Richard touched the walls on either side; they almost blistered his hands.

"In heaven's name, where am I?" cried the detective. "There are no volcanoes in this country, yet no one knows what the bowels of the mountains contain. Can't one get around this awful heat? It increases as I go forward."

His torch was out and he had nearly reached his last match.

All at once he turned into a little corridor where he could breathe without gasping. He went forward again.

Suddenly his foot touched an object that yielded.

The detective stooped and felt with his hands.

The next second he uttered a cry of horror. "I have found Sybil; but dead!—dead!" rung through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BACK FROM DEATH.

THE sleuth of two shores raised the inanimate form and started back through the darkness with the burden in his arms.

He was certain he had found Sybil, and in his haste to get beyond the terrible heat which was still a mystery he did not stop to strike another match.

Richard Redfire went down the main corridor which he had followed almost to the very spot where he had made the startling discovery.

The heat lessened as he advanced and when he halted he was far from the unseen and unexplained fire.

Then the detective drew from his pocket one of his last matches, and striking it on the wall held it close to the woman's face.

"As I thought!" he exclaimed. "It is Sybil."

Dead-like, without breath or motion, the victim of Silken Grip's swoop lay in the detective's arms.

He did not notice till then that her hands were tied at her back as if to cut off the remotest possibility of escape from the dungeon to which she had been condemned.

But Sybil the Nameless was not dead.

It was some time before Richard's efforts toward restoration met with any success.

The first sign was a dropping apart of the ashen lips, then the eyes got an expressive look and remained fixed on the man whose face was revealed by a torch he had improvised from pieces of dry pine gathered in the gloom of the cavern.

"Why did you come?" exclaimed Sybil, and then she shuddered as if she recalled some dreadful danger through which she had passed.

"You did not want to die here and lose the secret forever?"

"No! a thousand times no! I was immured here for life because I would not take the oath—the same one Cartouche tried to force from me in Paris. I was taken from Bumblebee City by two cool heads who belong to the gang that has followed me from the cradle. In the mountains I was taken away by one of the men, and conducted to a cavern where on my refusal the second time to speak the oath, my hands were bound, and I was left to perish in the heart of the earth. I suffered a thousand deaths before I fell headlong down what seemed a bottomless pit, for I became unconscious. When I awoke I seemed to be lying at the edge of a furnace. The heat was unbearable. I rose and tried to escape, but with the vengeance of a Nemesis the demon pursued. The heat grew in intensity. The walls blistered my hands when I touched them. My tongue swelled almost to bursting. I was suffering the agony of a martyr at the stake. With all my strength I pushed on and on, out of one corridor into another. But one desire, one hope, animated me. I wanted to escape from that awful torture. At last I could endure no longer. My feet seemed to give way under me; my brain whirled as I advanced, and all at once darkness, oblivion came and I knew no more."

Richard Redfire heard Sybil through without interrupting her.

It was a story that held him spellbound, and when he thought of the torture through which she had passed his lips met firmly, but he said nothing.

"You will forgive me for coming here, won't you?" suddenly continued Sybil, touching the detective's arm as she smiled.

"I waited so long for word from you. Hours grew into days, days seemed to lengthen into weeks. To remain in New York was torture. Zero came now and then, but he had no news. I could see that the little man was perplexed. I knew there were shadows on my trail, but I did not know that they were Silken Grip and his companion Moro until I was fairly in their clutches. They caught Zero at last, but just too late to net me in New York. When I started West I had the pair at my heels, but I did not know it. Heavens! if I had only been aware of the espionage!" and Sybil's eyes glittered.

"Ah! I would be willing to lose one-half of the secret if I could have caught the foreign ferrets on my track! I would not be here now. But the time to strike back will come. The day is not far distant when the arm of Sybil the Nameless will be powerful enough to avenge her own wrongs."

"You must quit this dungeon," said Richard. "Must I go back to New York to live in suspense again?"

"I have not said so."

"Thanks. Send me anywhere but back here. Colorado is the battle-ground and I want to be here."

"But not in the fight, Sybil," answered Richard, with a smile.

"I fear you cannot keep me out. What have you discovered? I know that Silken Grip was Cartouche's lieutenant across the sea. He told me this much before he left me in the hot sepulcher in the heart of the mountain. He believes me silenced forever, and by this time he is far away on the homeward trail. You told me ere you left New York that you thought you had a clew. You did not mean that you expected to find Silken Grip among these hills?"

"I did not."

"Ah! you were looking for Cartouche, then?" cried Sybil.

The detective answered with a smile but said nothing.

"When I was at Bumblebee City the mountain toughs were holding a prisoner whom they called Mormon Paul," resumed the Nameless.

"Did you see him?"

"No. I went from Durg's Hotel after a brief stay into the mountains between the two sleuths from France."

"Well, they haven't got the Mormon now."

"Did they execute the sentence of a lynchers' court on him?" cried Sybil.

"No; he escaped."

The reply astonished the detective's companion.

"I don't understand this," said she. "They were guarding him with the zeal of tigers. I heard enough at the hotel to make me believe that escape was impossible."

"Nevertheless, Sybil, the man cheated the noose."

"Then he was no ordinary person?"

"You are right. Mormon Paul is capable of proving a Tartar to almost any captors. I would have interfered in his behalf—indeed I did; but my interposition was not needed."

A quick look from Sybil was Richard Redfire's reward.

"You mystify me!" she exclaimed. "Why should you interfere in behalf of a man you have never seen, and a Mormon at that? You forget the crimes of the Mormon Church. It is guilty of all the sins hated by God and man, yet you tell me that you would have rescued this guilty pillar of Mormonism from the avenging halter of the men of Colorado."

"I would have done even that, Sybil," replied the detective, coolly.

"Then you know the man."

The semblance of a smile appeared at the corners of Richard Redfire's mouth. It disappeared while Sybil silently regarded him, and his countenance lapsed into its old expression.

"Who and what Mormon Paul is let the future show," he remarked. "He will be heard from ere long in another quarter if I am not mistaken. The Mormon isn't going to leave the country without showing its tough inhabitants that a tiger is loose. But let us dismiss him for the present. You must get away from here."

"But I must not bother you on this trail," smiled Sybil. "I see it all, Richard. If I had remained in New York you would be nearer success than you are at this moment?"

"I will not say so, Sybil. You will go to Denver. I will conduct you to excellent quarters there. You will be nearer the battle-ground than New York. I will leave you in Denver and come back to the trail."

"Then it is here?"

"It is not far off."

"You have tidings of Cartouche—the man who alone possesses the secret of my birth and of my life."

"I have not said so, have I?"

"No, but—"

"Wait for my report," was the interruption. "They believe in Paris that Cartouche is dead, but my word for it, Sybil, that the fox of foxes, the greatest rascal of his time, is yet in a condition to reveal the truth. If the halter of the Gentiles does not get between us I will make the past an open book to you."

"I think I see," cried Sybil, and then the detective gently shook off the hand that darted forward and touched him.

"Well, don't give the walls a chance to spread your secret," he responded. "Keep to yourself any discovery you think you have made. The game is not played out yet. Indeed, the most exciting part of it is yet to come."

"If I had but known this when I rode into Bumblebee City," Sybil exclaimed. "The man was still in the toils. I would have passed beyond his guards; they could not have kept me away from Mormon Paul. And when I found myself face to face with that man, I—"

"There! don't tell these walls the secret you think you hold."

"I will not. But the time will come when I shall force from that devil's throat the truth he has kept so well."

"We may be mistaken."

"No! you are playing with me now!" cried Sybil. "I heard of Monsieur Ledocq long before I found him in the guise of Richard Redfire in New York. He never makes mistakes. It is his boast—or used to be—that he never picked up a clew that did not lead him to success. You cannot beat down my hopes. You have found Cartouche! Now, what you want is to fasten on him the grip of the sleuth of two worlds."

"You go to Denver first," was the quiet re-

sponse of the detective, who had met Sybil's words with another smile.

"I will go to the end of the world if you command," she cried. "It is enough for me to hear that you have recovered the trail you lost years ago. Come, Richard Redfire, I am eager to begin to wait for your report in Denver."

A few minutes later the detective and Sybil stood under the stars that showed their golden light upon rock and tree.

They had left the cavern without investigating the cause of the intense heat, and were now on the trail which, if followed in its windings, would bring them to the capital of the young State—Denver.

"Put me fairly on the trail, then turn back and reap success," said the woman looking down from the saddle of the detective's horse into his upturned face.

"No. I will see you safe in Denver. A trail never gets cold to me. I've picked up links in the snow. This trail is now one of the plainest I ever saw. Sybil, Richard Redfire will not lose the scent again!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORMON PAUL AGAIN.

THE night after Mormon Paul's escape from the roughs and toughs of Bumblebee City, Deuce-o'-Diamonds had a decided sensation.

This was nothing less than the sudden disappearance of Hazel, the Mormon's alleged wife—the young girl whom we have seen rescued from his clutches at the muzzle of the revolver.

Strange to say, Lucky Livingstone was the first to discover the empty cabin, and not for some time after his return from Bumble after the failure to convict and execute the doomed pillar of the Mormon Church.

Had Mormon Paul regained possession of the girl, and was he at that time making off with the beautiful prize for which he had risked his precious neck?

The men of the mining-camp were loth to believe this.

They did not like to confess that a Mormon had beaten them. They could have acknowledged a little hoodwinking at the hands of a Gentile, but by a Saint—it was asking too much.

No one had seen the Mormon about during the day, but everything pointed to the girl's absence against her will.

She seemed satisfied with her surroundings, and Deuce-o'-Diamonds was growing proud of the distinction she lent to the camp.

There was not another mining camp among the Silver Hills that could boast of an "angel" like the little woman.

A close inspection of Hazel's abode convinced the searchers that the girl had not run away.

True, she had refused to go to Bumblebee to testify against the Mormon, but Lucky Livingstone was sure her refusal had not been based on any love for the wretch.

When asked what he thought it did mean, he gave an evasive answer which satisfied his questioners that he did not know.

In a little while after the discovery which threw Deuce-o'-Diamonds into a state of excitement a band of bronzed Vigilantes headed by Livingstone and Solid Silver Dick was on the trail.

Not exactly on the trail, for Mormon Paul, if he had swooped down on the camp and carried the girl off—had left no track by which the keenest eyes could follow.

The avenging hunters of human flesh had taken a startling oath before setting out on the chase.

This time there was to be no dilly-dallying, no trial and no sentence.

It was to be simply an execution, and the body of the Mormon exile was to be left to the vultures of the air and the wild beasts of the mountains.

"If Chispa Chick had not waited for us," argued Lucky Luke, "we would not be after the Mormon rascal now. I'll bet a thousand that we won't send for Bumblebee when we have the Salt Lake viper; but we'll crush his head at once and leave him in the trail."

Such was the spirit that pervaded the entire band, which wound itself among the mountain trails in search of the Mormon Ishmael of the Silver Hills.

Man had been hunted before over those same trails and through the same hills, but he had never had at his heels such a determined pack of human bloodhounds.

It was believed that Mormon Paul would strike north from Deuce-o'-Diamond to a spot where the well-defined Denver trail crossed the mountain path.

It was rumored and believed to some extent that there existed in the unexplored heart of the wildest canyon lands of Colorado, a small secret camp of Mormon exiles.

There was nothing to substantiate this, but rumor had fastened to rumor so much during the past several years, that in the minds of some the camp was a fixed fact.

However, no Gentile had seen it, and its location was not known to any man who hated the Mormon religion.

All that was known, and that was not much,

was that the expert trailer might start from where the two paths crossed and find the home of the exiles.

Of course Mormon Paul was credited with knowing the exact position of the camp, and the men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds were ready to believe that he was on his way to it when overhauled for the first time at Durg's hotel in Bumblebee City.

It was a long way to the place where the trails met and the hunted Saint had an excellent start.

Meantime, what had become of Hazel?

Had she left Deuce-o'-Diamonds of her own will, or were Lucky Livingstone and his companions correct in their surmises?

The girl had disappeared before the return of the disappointed men from Bumblebee, but not long before.

There were some who had seen her at sundown standing in the door of her cabin, and one or two were almost positive that they had heard her inside an hour later.

All this was true.

Hazel, the Mormon's victim, was still an inmate of Deuce-o'-Diamonds when the returning pards were on their last few miles.

Night and silence had come down on the camp some time before.

The absence of one-half of the population gave the other half a chance to fight the mountain "tiger" over the clothless tables of the man who ran the only faro-den in camp.

And they were all there.

This is why no one saw the figure which entered the camp at one end and walked coolly toward Hazel's cabin. The slouch-like hat pulled down over the face formed no clew to the man, and his step did not betray him.

He did not halt until he reached the girl's house, where he listened at the door a few seconds, with one of his hands all the time close to his belt.

All at once his hand pressed the wooden latch discernible in the starlight, and a slight push sent the portal ajar.

As he crossed the threshold into a darkened room, a voice asked, "Who is there?"

The man made no answer, but turned noiselessly toward the voice and took a step forward.

If he could have pierced the space before him, he would have seen a breathless girl.

Hazel's hand was already on the lamp on a little shelf overhead and her hand was about to strike a match.

She hesitated to put the question she had just spoken, and as it brought no response she drew the match across the log.

As the little spark leaped up, the wondering girl leaned forward, eager to catch a glimpse of the cool intruder.

The following second she stood spell-bound before two glowing eyes and in the presence of the last man she expected to see under her roof.

It was Mormon Paul!

Hazel's consternation seemed to increase her hold on the match, which burned up, revealing her pallid face, as well as the triumphant, laughing eyes of the Mormon exile.

"In Heaven's name, how did you get away?" broke suddenly over the girl's lips.

Mormon Paul laughed as he took another step toward the girl.

"Wasn't looking for me, eh?" he cried.

"No," answered Hazel, speaking her thoughts involuntarily.

"It takes a good cage to hold me. I've been in a dozen in my time, but they could not keep me long. You have a fine nest here—a fine nest for a fine bird. Ha, ha!"

The Mormon's laugh was cold and cruel, and Hazel knew that the tiger passions were uppermost in the Saint's heart.

"You don't want to go away, I presume?" he continued.

"I am content here."

"With the men who wanted to pull me up to a limb? Of course! You don't want to quit the nest they have given the Mormon bird."

"I am not a Mormon!" cried Hazel. "You forget—"

"You are Mormon or nothing!" interrupted the exile. "You are wedded to the code of the Mormon religion till the day of your death. I would like to see you get back to the Gentiles while I live! I wonder if the vermin of Bumblebee City and their pards thought I would leave you, in my haste to save my neck? You were uppermost in my mind all the time. I am here for my wife."

Hazel uttered a sharp cry, which was stifled by the Mormon's hand.

"Your—wife? My God—"

"My Mormon wife, at that!" laughed the wretch. "You are wedded to me as with bands of steel, and woe to the man or men who attempts to separate us!"

The girl, driven back to the unyielding logs of the cabin by his advance, could go no further, and the hot hand that encircled her wrist seemed to burn its way to the bone.

"We are going, now," continued Mormon Paul, his voice sinking to a hoarse whisper. "Don't ask me whither, girl. You may rest assured that we will not retrace our steps.

Mormondom is behind us, but do not think that because we are in the land of the Gentiles, the ceremony performed in the Tabernacle will not hold. It binds till death—yea, my wife, till the Judgment!"

A moment afterward, Hazel found herself walking toward the door with that iron grip still at her wrist.

Once she glanced at the Mormon's other hand and saw the fingers twined resolutely about the silvered hilt of a dagger.

Mormon Paul caught the look.

"Yes, lady, the bird gets the dagger before she remains with the reptiles of the camps!" came through his teeth as he raised his hand showing Hazel the glittering blade. "Remember that while you keep a silent tongue the stake of the game is a living one; but the moment you cry out, it will be a dead prize!"

These words needed no explanation, and the girl walked down the main street of the camp with the man she loathed.

She heard the boisterous laughter that came from the faro cabin, but she dared not answer it with an appeal for help.

The Gentile girl knew the coolness, the audacity of the villain at her side.

They left the camp and passed into the mountains.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Hazel looking into Mormon Paul's face when he halted and turned toward the plundered camp. "You have made yourself a hunted man for the second time."

"You are mistaken. It is for the third time," he replied. "Before we crossed the line I was hunted by the Mormon Church, then by the pards of Bumblebee City, and now have added the human hounds of your camp to the pack."

"Do you expect to escape?"

"If I do not you will not live to laugh at the triumph of the allies!" was the quick retort.

Then after awhile he added while Hazel felt the clutch tighten at her wrist.

"I expect to escape. I shall elude all the dogs of the trail, both Mormon and Gentile. I will take vengeance for the past, and live like a prince in the future where not one of the many who want my blood to-night will dare lift a hand against me."

"Where is that?"

"It is not in this country. It is not under the flag of the United States. I am going to put a sea between us and the curs of the mountains. I am going back to the land where Mormon Paul will get into his old clothes once more!"

Hazel did not speak.

Her eyes were riveted on the man before her, and at that moment she thought him more demon than human.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SLEUTH AND THE MAN OF FATE.

NOTHING exciting broke the ride of the American detective and Sybil to Denver.

They rode into the city just as the shadows of night were falling around it, for an extra horse which Richard Redfire purchased in a certain camp had enabled both to make the entry in the saddle.

Denver had a sensation at that time, but it was not of that sort which delights the tragic novelist.

A new gold field had been discovered—a field so rich in wealth that the wildest stories concerning it were swallowed without question.

Everybody in Denver seemed to be talking about the new Ophir. They would talk about nothing else, and when the detective conducted Sybil into the most prominent hotel in the city, he was asked if he had heard of the new mines.

It will be remembered that Silken Grip had promised to wait for Moro in Denver.

This person, who sometimes called himself the Man of Fate, thought he had silenced forever the woman who had stubbornly refused to take the oath against herself in the mountains.

He was to tarry two weeks for his companion.

If at the end of that time Moro did not come, he was under no obligations to stay a moment longer, neither did he intend to.

Richard Redfire or Don Domingo as he called himself when he crossed the threshold of the Denver hotel, was soon out on the street mingling with the excited swarms that talked mine, mine, and would talk nothing else.

Now that he had placed Sybil, he was at liberty to go back to the battle-ground in the Silver Hills.

Mormon Paul has escaped from his enemies and was at large once more.

The message sent by Romeo to Chispa Chick had not assisted the exiled Saint as the detective had heard from Moro.

Of course Mormon Paul would be hunted.

His flight would exasperate the Colorado toughs to such a degree that they would not rest a moment on the trail, and the detective knew that the recapture would be followed by a running noose and a strong limb.

Richard Redfire was no stranger in Denver.

Years before when on the trail of the man he had completely lost, the city had been his headquarters for a time, and he had passed through it on his way East after the failure.

For all this he had few hopes of finding on this

visit many persons he had met with during the former one.

He did not expect to be tapped on the shoulder familiarly before he had gone forty paces from the hotel.

He turned half-way around at the touch, and saw a man whose face was as sallow as a Mexican's, and whose sombrero-like hat added further to the resemblance.

The man with a grin held out a hand to Richard.

"You've come back just in time to become a nabob!" laughed the stranger. "Did you ever find the rascal who stole your lynch-pins?"

The American ferret saw that he was recognized, but by whom? This was the question.

As we know, he had found in Romeo the purloiner of the lynch-pins, which theft had caused him to lose Cartouche, his prey, but he did not see fit to enlighten the man who wanted to know.

"I am not looking for lynch-pin robbers," answered Richard, still trying to "place" the man before him.

"It would not be worth while after all this time, ha, ha," was the response. "You are looking after something better than lynch-pins, probably. The new mine ought to make you a nabob, as I've said."

"I don't want a finger in the pie."

"It's a golden one, captain. The plums are nuggets, so large that each one is a fortune. *Caramba!* I don't think you recollect me."

"It is not much matter if I do not," said Richard, carelessly; but his well assumed indifference deceived and nettled the other.

"I am Pablo," said he.

"Pish! there are a thousand Pablos. One in a thousand! that's not much."

"I am Pablo Paquita."

"Hal that is quite a difference!" exclaimed the detective. "Well, what is it, Pablo Paquita?"

"Don't you want to invest?"

Richard Redfire could not repress a smile.

"Invest in what?" he asked.

"In luck—in me!" cried Pablo, striking his breast.

"Oho! I think I see through your scheme. You have come from the tiger stripped of everything but your skin."

"And my honor," added the man with a bow and a smile.

"You want to go back to the claws again," continued the detective.

"I do. I had just reached the turning point when my money gave out. I swear to you that I know the combination that will win from now on. But how can I prove it? See!"

Pablo Paquita the gambler dropped his hands into the depths of his pockets and brought them up empty.

His expression was mournful and without hope.

"How much do you want?" asked Richard.

The man's face instantly brightened.

"With fifty dollars I can break the bank!" he exclaimed.

"You can do nothing of the kind. You are too sanguine. These Denver tigers know when to quit teasing their victim. You can go back and try, Pablo Paquita."

"A thousand thanks, captain! I will pay you back compound interest before morning. The lucky man at the table is a stranger who is in league with Satan. If he has not broken the bank, I will complete its ruin."

"Where did you play?"

"At the Golden Ophir. Stay! can't you come down and see me catch fortune in spite of herself?"

"I may be down," replied the detective. "Don't give the tiger all you have at one swoop. But you are old at it, Pablo. You don't need any advice. Go and give the bank a chill."

Off came the sombrero, and with it a ludicrous bow, and Richard Redfire walked away, leaving the gambler looking after him with the new stake clutched in his hand.

"He must be something of a nabob to launch out fifty dollars like that," muttered Pablo Paquita. "I wonder if he is off on another trail on which he is likely to lose his lynch-pins and his man at the same time? He came out of the Grand Colorado Hotel, so I'll know where to find him, provided I get flush enough before morning to keep my word. If I lose, why, I won't send up my card. Well, I guess not, Pablo."

The gambler went back to the illuminated den where he had been fleeced a short time before.

The money given him by the detective burned his pockets, and he was eager to throw it on the turn of a card.

As for Richard Redfire, he sauntered along the lighted streets with nothing particular in hand.

He wanted a brief rest before he returned to the hunt in the mountains, and he knew no place wherein he could get a better one than in Denver.

Now and then he stopped to listen to the all-prevailing topic—the new mines a few miles from town.

Thus an hour passed.

He might have listened till midnight to the highly-colored accounts of the mines.

At last he found himself surfeited with such stuff, and with nothing to do.

Why not go down to the Golden Ophir and see how Pablo Paquita was getting along with his tilt with fortune?"

The thought was hardly born before he turned on his heels and walked briskly from the spot.

A place of the notoriety of the faro bank was not hard to find.

With his knowledge of cities and city life, Richard went almost straight to its inviting door.

The next moment he was inside, and three strides brought him face to face with the fifty men who were risking their gold on the turn of a card.

Nobody looked up, and the detective passed unnoticed down the room, till he stopped near the table where Pablo Paquita, with every nerve at tension and his face almost white, was watching the hazard with the eye of a hawk.

"The fellow has noosed fortune, sure enough," mentally exclaimed the American sleuth, as he spied at Pablo's elbow a stack of money and chips that must have represented hundreds of dollars.

Then he fell back a pace and watched the man who played, as if his very soul was at stake.

Pablo Paquita did not seem to breathe.

His eyes saw nothing but the little cards that came up out of the box in the dealer's hand.

When he won he received his winnings with a Satanic smile, when he lost, which was very seldom, he bit his lip with his sharp teeth, and frowned.

Nearly opposite Pablo sat a man who won with startling regularity.

Richard Redfire could not see his face from where he stood, but he could observe that he had a shapely figure, a good head, and a black mustache.

The two men seemed to be pitted against each other. Pablo mentally cursed the stranger's fortune, and he in turn anathematized Pablo's luck.

Pablo lost just often enough to irritate him.

When he won he threw a victorious look across the table at his rival, when fortune went against him he would send a frown in the same direction.

One peculiarity about the game was that Pablo and the stranger never betted on the same card.

The detective saw that after each loss Pablo Paquita doubled his bets.

Richard Redfire tried to catch the reckless gambler's eye.

He was sure he could admonish Pablo against this foolish procedure, but the gambler would not look up and give him a chance.

At last Pablo lost three times in succession.

It was something he had not done since the detective's arrival on the scene.

What did it mean? Had fortune turned fairly against the gambler with the black eyes and sallow skin?

The fourth time came.

A half-choked curse parted Pablo Paquita's lips.

He looked up, but did not see the man so intently watching him.

"There goes all his wealth, the fool!" ejaculated the detective. "He puts it on the same old cord which has nearly beggared him. If he loses now I am fifty dollars out, and—By Jove! he has lost it all!"

At that moment a sound midway between a curse and a groan rose above the noise of the raking in of winnings and Pablo Paquita sprung up with livid face.

"My gold has dropped into the lap of the devil's agent!" he shouted, pointing with quivering finger across the table at the lucky stranger whose card had won again. "He plays with the magic of perdition, and Satan is at his ear with his lips of luck! *Caramba!* why do you let that man and the devil play against you? Look at him! I've made his eyes flash. He don't like the truth, the imp of purchased luck! I—I—"

The end was a wild shriek that thrilled even the impassive gamblers at the table.

Pablo Paquita threw a hand to his heart as if a dart had struck there, and the next instant he pitched back over his chair, the cry ending as he fell!

Richard Redfire darted toward the stricken man.

"Let the fool die!" said a voice at the table. "The game must not stop."

The detective looked back over his shoulder and saw the words still trembling the lips of Pablo's rival.

He knew the man on sight.

It was Silken Grip, the Man of Fate.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SLEUTH DOGS SLEUTH.

THE instant the detective saw the lucky gambler he thought of Sybil.

He had brought her to the very city inhabited by the cool villain from whose merciless hands she had escaped by a miracle.

Silken Grip went back to the play almost before his voice had ceased to sound.

Already the game had been resumed, and Richard Redfire with a last look at the Man of Fate followed the body of Pablo Paquita which was carried out by two men with no show of gentleness, and very little ceremony.

It was believed that Pablo's intense excitement had snapped his heartstrings and in a twinkling put an end to his life.

Such things had occurred before though not about the faro tables of the Golden Ophir.

Men generally died there before the flash of the revolver, and as little was thought of it as was thought of Pablo's end.

Silken Grip had not appeared to have taken the slightest notice of the sleuth of two worlds, but five minutes after his departure he quietly raked in his winnings which were very large and left the room.

Nobody questioned his right to do this.

In point of fact the other gamblers were glad they were rid of him for he had won almost unceasingly, and now some one else would have a chance.

Richard Redfire went back to the Grand Colorado where he had left Sybil.

He walked into the room she occupied showing no unusual event by his countenance.

"Your old enemy is on the ground, Sybil," said the detective.

The woman started.

"My old enemy?" she echoed. "What! have you found Cartouche?"

"Not the captain, but his lieutenant."

"Then, you have seen Silken Grip."

The detective's response was a smile which to Sybil was answer enough.

"Show me the prince of villains!" cried Sybil, and the next moment she stood erect before Don Domingo, her brilliant eyes flashing in the lamp-light and her white hands clinched in passion.

"No. I do not ask that much at your hands, Captain Redfire. Tell me where you saw the man of no mercy; that will do. The tortures of the burning cavern I feel still all through my system, and I burn to stand face to face with the author of them all. You cannot be mistaken, I trust."

"Mistaken? I knew the voice before I saw his face. I found him where I used to find him in Paris—at the play."

"Of course," said Sybil. "I will go from den to den till I find him, then, by the souls of my dead! I will show him that the trail across the sea is his last."

"The time has not come for that."

"What! am I to hold back when the man next to Cartouche is within my reach?"

"Yes," answered the detective firmly.

Sybil looked at him a moment like a person on the point of rebellion.

"He may take flight," she went on. "Once out of Denver, he may proceed to put an ocean between us."

"If he had been in a hurry he would not be here to-night. Silken Grip is not going away without the comrade who turned back to solve two mysteries—to find you and to discover if possible the truth about the old captain Cartouche."

"Then," said Sybil cooling down, "then, I need not be so eager to strike. I need a little rest before I seek Silken Grip. I want to lull him into security. But Moro may come and tell him that you found the cavern in the Silver Hills."

"The Cartouche mystery will keep Moro back. He believes just enough to hold him from Silken Grip a few days. My word for it, Sybil, Moro will not disturb his comrade's dalliance at the tiger tables of Denver."

The woman looked pleased.

"You are to quit the hotel at once," continued the detective.

"Aha! you fear the eyes of the lieutenant of the Parisian cabal."

"I don't want to take any risks. Silken Grip won't live at the faro table."

"That is true. I am at your service. I am in your hands, Captain Redfire. Command me as you please, but do not for a moment forget that some day I must face my torturer."

Half an hour later the American sleuth and a woman entered an unpretentious house away from the heart of Denver, and the detective walked from it alone.

He had exacted from Sybil another promise that she would not seek the man whom she hated, but that she would keep close to the house until she again heard from him.

The detective went back to the Golden Ophir.

The first look down the most prominent showed him that Silken Grip's place was filled by another, and that the game was proceeding as quietly as ever.

The man he sought was gone.

Perhaps he had sought out another gambling den where he could play with fortune again. This was natural.

Richard Redfire went from place to place, but without success.

"If I were to place a thousand Napoleons on a son, I would not be running any risk," muttered a man who followed the sleuth like a shadow. "That man is Monsieur Ledocq,

though Heaven knows under how many names he travels now. On my trail, eh, monsieur? Maybe you, too, half believe that Cartouche is not dead. He got away from you somewhere in America a few years ago, and, like a hound that hates to give up the scent, you come back to the old trail. The next thing you will be after me. If you know that two cool heads took Sybil from Durg's hotel in Bumblebee City, you will be looking for me sure enough."

It was not far from midnight when a man walked into the Grand Colorado and quietly lighted a cigar.

His face was covered by a glossy black beard. A large mustache of the same hue dropped over his mouth.

He advanced to the open register, turned it around and looked down the page.

In an instant almost his eyes gleamed, for they had alighted on a name through which a pen had been heavily drawn.

He glanced up to see whether any one was watching him, and seeing that he was not observed, he bent over the book and tried to make out the name.

After several trials, he read the contents of the particular line:

"RICHARD RAGAN, Deadwood."

"So it is Ragan instead of Redfire, is it?" he ejaculated. "He keeps the two R's of his American name, as if loth to part with them. He was here; he had a room—Number 29, I see—and gave it up without occupying it. As there was no charge made, the proprietor just drew a pen across the name. I know now that the Yankee sleuth came in to-night. Now, what made him give up his room here?"

At that moment Silken Grip caught the eye of the owner of the Grand Colorado—a large man with a genial face bridged by a pair of heavy gold spectacles.

"My friend didn't stay long?" said the rascal, designating the erased name with his finger.

"No; he went off with his lady friend unexpectedly, and not long after she had taken her room."

Here was a revelation for Silken Grip.

A woman with the American ferret?

What did it mean?

"Has he left Denver?" he asked, trying not to betray any eagerness, though he was not sure he had succeeded.

"I cannot say."

"It's a queer way to treat an old friend," laughed Silken Grip. "Ten chances to one that he has picked up a charming wife somewhere—"

"The lady was pretty, anyhow," broke in the landlord.

"Tall?"

"Rather so."

"That's not very definite, colonel!"

Then followed just what the shrewd villain wanted—a well-drawn picture of Sybil the Nameless.

The description was embellished with a good deal of superfluous language, but it told Silken Grip that Sybil had escaped from the subterranean dungeons, and that the hand of Richard Redfire was in it.

A feeling he could not describe took possession of him when he found himself beyond the portals of the Grand Colorado with the knowledge of Sybil's nearness in his mind.

"Richard Redfire, the sleuth, must have recognized me at the Golden Ophir, when Pablo Paquita let his losses snap his heart-strings. This being so, he came back here and took Sybil away. I lost him a while ago on the street. What a fool I was! If I had stuck to him a while longer, he would have led me to the woman. Now, I am at fault. A thousand curses on my head for my short-sightedness!"

It was now sleuth after sleuth in the capital of Colorado.

Silken Grip could think of nothing but the coming of Sybil to Denver in company with the man who was her sleuthhound and her avenger.

He went from hotel to hotel, and those that had registers were closely inspected.

But all in vain.

Long after midnight Silken Grip stood baffled and enraged in the door of the last hotel.

He had lost the quarry.

"Maybe I can strike the trail at the Golden Ophir," said he, catching at the straw that thought threw across his path. "If the shadow is looking for me, he may have been back to the bank. The little usher there knows everybody who comes in—that is, he marks them with his eye. I will go back. If Richard Redfire has not been back since he went out with the body of Pablo Paquita, then the hunt ends for to-night."

Silken Grip bent his steps toward the Golden Ophir which was always open to those who had money to throw away on the turn of a card.

He passed into the room where the never empty tables stood.

Although it was another day, the lamps threw their brilliant glare about the room and the French sport saw the motionless figures and sleepless eyes of the all-night players.

As he walked toward the counter at the end

of the room where a little man was surveying the tables, he caught sight of a figure that halted him in his tracks.

"In Satan's name, I thought he was dead!" cried Silken Grip.

The man he saw was a sallow-faced gambler who was watching the cards with eyes that looked like living coals. A scanty pile of chips lay at his elbow and while the detective's trailer looked, he saw one of his hands clutch them all.

The following moment, with a hissed "*Caramba!*" the player stacked all his pile, and then watched the car about to appear with the insane interest of a fiend.

Silken Grip was interested beyond expression.

The man before him was Pablo Paquita himself, who had come back from the dead as it were, and with another stake was trying to retrieve his fortunes.

When the turn came a mad cry announced that Pablo had lost every dollar that he possessed.

He sprang up just as he had done before on a similar occasion.

"You can't blame the man you called the devil's agent this time," smiled the dealer, as he caught Pablo's eyes. "He isn't here."

"Say not so. Look yonder!" roared the gambler, and his hand pointing across the table called everybody's attention to Silken Grip. "I would have won if his eyes had not put a spell on the cards. By my saint! he sha'n't bewitch them again!"

Silken Grip was not prepared for what followed.

A wild spring across the table and straight at his throat was the last thing he expected of Pablo Paquita, yet that is just what followed, and as Silken Grip was forced toward the wall, he saw the madman's hand rise and fall three times.

Pablo Paquita had a knife!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"TRACK ME AND DIE."

"TAKE the yaller dog off!" yelled some body, and twenty men were on their feet at once.

The leap across the table and the impetuous attack were scenes which had never been witnessed before in the Golden Ophir famous though it was for startling events.

Half a dozen men rushed forward to obey the voice which had just rung out, but they were outstripped by a stranger who caught Paquita's arm as it was coming down for the fourth time, and arrested it in mid-air.

Silken Grip was pinned to the wall by the mad Greaser's left hand, and the furious attack seemed to have dazed him.

There was blood on the sport's bosom, and an ominous stain darkened the blade of Pablo's dagger. It, too, was blood.

The Man of Fate fixed his gaze on the person who had interfered, and a singular look overspread his face.

"He still knows how to come between at the right moment," he mentally ejaculated, and then he made a dash at Pablo Paquita, but the hand that had stopped the knife arrested him.

The broken gamster was pulled off with murder-leaping up in the depths of his snapping eyes, and with his yellow fingers about the handle of the knife.

Pablo Paquita showed no remorse. He seemed to regret that he had not been permitted to finish his work.

He looked again at his enemy and then at the crowd half of which was going back to the tables where the game had been interrupted by the thrilling episode just narrated.

"Go home," said the man who had stepped in, and the Mexican walked away, but with the knife still ready for an emergency.

Silken Grip stepped from the wall and walked toward the counter.

A sardonic smile wreathed his lips just visible beneath the beard he wore.

"It wasn't much, though it might have been a good deal," he remarked, opening his bosom and showing a two-inch cut across the breast. "A crazy man strikes blindly, and the dog of a Greaser did not guide his knife with his eye. I owe him one, and, gentlemen, I always pay my debts."

He spoke the last sentence with a quietness that impressed the listeners that from that hour an evil day was in store for Pablo Paquita, and as Silken Grip buttoned his jacket, they drew off and left him to drink his congratulatory glass alone.

"I wonder what became of Richard Redfire?" thought the French sport. "He didn't want Paquita to finish me else he would not have taken him off. Look out, Monsieur Ledocq! You may wish you had not interfered at the Golden Ophir to-night."

He looked for the American sleuth, but Richard was not to be seen. After saving Silken Grip's life he had disappeared, and ere then had doubtless gone back to Sybil the Nameless wherever he had left her.

Silken Grip knew naught of the ferret's pres-

ence in the faro den, until he stopped the Mexican's arm in its downward plunge.

If he had seen the man before he would not have given Paquita a chance to leap at throat and heart.

The French sport did not go back to watch the game.

He paid his score at the bar and slipped quietly out as if his life had not been at the point of a madman's dagger for ten seconds.

He did not know but that the Mexican was waiting for him outside where the shadows of buildings lay, each one a fit ambush for just such a man as the vengeful Pablo.

No one met him at the door.

The streets of Denver were almost quiet.

It was the period of darkness that precedes the burst of a new day.

All at once a sharp footstep rung out behind Silken Grip.

"The Greaser!" passed through his mind as he turned with a cocked revolver half-way out of his belt.

Instead of the wiry figure of Pablo Paquita, there came forward under the lamp which hung above the door of the faro bank, the form of Richard Redfire.

"Ho! my rescuer!" thought Silken Grip, and then he waited for the detective to come up.

In a moment the two men stood face to face once more.

"I had to look twice before I knew you," began Richard. "You have raised a full beard since sundown; but Pablo Paquita knew you at sight."

"Curse his eyes, he can see through a stone wall!" answered Silken Grip. "I owe you thanks for coming to the rescue when you did. That fellow really meant to split my heart on his knife."

"He meant to do nothing less, and but for his blind fury you would not be here laughing over the leap of the Greaser lion."

"Perhaps not. I thought the rascal fell dead to-night."

"It was thought so at the time; but he was all right in less than an hour, and when he had made another raise he came back to the trap. You know me, I presume?"

"I would be blind if I did not," replied Silken Grip with a peculiar grin. "You are Monsieur Ledocq, though I don't know exactly what name you are masquerading under in Denver."

Richard Redfire looked at the speaker several seconds before he made reply.

"You are a long way from the old ground," he said at length. "I presume you are on the same business that bothered all of you a few years ago in Paris."

"All of us?" exclaimed Silken Grip like a person who does not comprehend.

"All of the old Parisian cabal whose sworn purpose was to get possession of the greatest fortune that ever tempted man. I don't wonder that it brought you to America. It brought your Captain Cartouche hither before you."

"And lost him somewhere in the American wilderness, ha, ha!" laughed Silken Grip.

"That is to be determined in the future," was the response.

"Don't you believe it?"

"I have not said that I do not."

"Of course not," answered the French sport. "But have you sought me out to say this?"

"No, but I want to say that the game played so well in Paris may fail in Colorado."

"The game, Monsieur Ledocq?"

"Yes; it is the same game—the golden one."

"Do you know this?"

"It is my business to know some things."

"As a sleuth, yes; that is true."

"You did not find Sybil in New York when you wanted her?"

Silken Grip gave a slight start.

"You trailed her across the continent—you and Moro."

"Well?"

"You carried her away from Bumblebee City in the teeth of half a dozen of its citizens. It was a cool trick worthy of your brain, Silken Grip."

"Don't give me all the credit."

"I do not forget Moro, but I give you your dues. You might have known that Sybil would not take the oath you wanted. There is a vow ahead of it."

"I thought as much," the French trailer said with a slight smile.

"You kept from Moro a secret which, as a brother, you might have shared with him. You would not let him know the manner of Sybil's doom."

Silken Grip said nothing.

"Moro did not betray you," continued the detective as if he read the man's thoughts. "When you meet again you need not upbraid the man you would not trust. You thrust your victim bound into an underground hell. There she was to perish who would not take the oath which would place the enormous stakes in your hands."

"Look here, Captain Ledocq," exclaimed Silken Grip. "Isn't the prize worth all the risk?"

"The risk of neck and life, Silken Grip?"

"Yes, yes!"

"It is worth a good deal," answered the detective.

"Twenty million francs in money for one thing."

"And the everlasting ruin of a beautiful woman for another."

"What do you mean?"

"You can win only by stepping over the happiness of Sybil, called the Nameless," was the reply. "Give her her rights; restore to her the name she bore in her cradle, and you lose the stakes. Force the oath from her lips, or prove to the French courts that a certain person is dead and the game is yours."

"You put things tersely, captain," smiled Silken Grip.

"I put them as they are, and as you know them to exist."

"Granted. Then you do not intend that we shall win?"

"I do not."

"Do you know the odds against you?"

"I know them all."

"You have made enemies of two mountain camps."

"Yes."

"You had to step from your trail long enough to attempt to save a Mormon exile from the halter."

"A Mormon!" emphasized the detective. "If you knew the truth you might have given Mormon Paul some assistance yourself."

"I?" cried Silken Grip. "One of the blood-stained Saints of the infamous church is nothing to me."

"Very well. I have set the toughs of the camps against me as you say. You may proceed to inform me that I have also the old cabal to fight."

"That is true as well as the other."

"I know that this is not Paris. We can't track one another over the ground we used to cover in the capital. There it was street, alley and sewer; here it is mountain, canyon and camp. Let us call the game fairly on, Captain Ledocq."

"Then you intend to fight it out?"

"Of course!"

"Why you don't even know the secret by which you can win," exclaimed the detective. "That was Cartouche's property."

"So it was. Cartouche left certain papers behind him. We believe they contain the secret, but of course to win we must have the oath from Sybil, or—"

"I'll finish for you," put in the detective. "You must have the oath or the woman's life."

She must swear to cease to want to know her identity, or forfeit the existence so dear to her. Silken Grip, you had better go back to Paris."

"Empty-handed? Never!"

The following moment the French sport leaned forward and his hand touched the American shadow's arm.

"You had better go back to your Mormon, Monsieur Ledocq," he laughed. "Though the fellow is at large, he is still in the shadow of the noose, and he may need your help again ere long. The men of the banded camps—banded now against the hunted apostle and his friends—would like to see you as the champion of the guilty Saint. I think you are needed where Mormon Paul is to-night, provided the avengers have not overtaken him and treated him to a limb."

The cutting tones of Silken Grip were exasperating; but they did not draw any like reply from the level-headed sleuth.

"Choose your trail," said Richard Redfire, stepping back. "If you stay in Denver, look out for the man of bad luck."

"Paquita, the dog?" laughed Silken Grip. "I am ready for the fool with the knife whenever he chooses to finish his work. By pulling him off to-night, you only gave the Greaser madman a lease of life."

"I have warned you twice. Beware!"

Richard Redfire turned and walked away, with the last word sounding where he had stood.

"He is going to Sybil—to the woman who stands between us and twenty millions of francs!" thought Silken Grip.

Over the hills beyond Denver the first beams of a new day were appearing.

The Man of Fate took a step forward.

The sleuth of two continents was still in sight.

"I don't lose him again!" exclaimed the spy.

A moment later Silken Grip sprang toward the corner around which the detective had disappeared. As he turned it he halted, and became a statue of horror in the dawn.

Ten feet away stood Richard with leveled six-shooter.

Behind the weapon were two audaciously cool eyes.

"Track me and die!" said the sleuth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TRACKING THE TRACKED.

WHILE these events were transpiring in Denver, some miles to the south other scenes connected with some of the characters of our romance were taking place.

We will return to them.

Mormon Paul had escaped from Deuce-o-

Diamonds with his beautiful prize just in time to save his neck.

If he had withheld the capture for a spell he would have fallen into the hands of the pards who had come back disappointed from Bumblebee City.

We left the pair among the mountains some distance from the scene of the Mormon vulture's successful swoop.

The hunted Saint was elated with the result of his mission.

He had already turned the tables on the men who wanted his life; he had paid them back by regaining possession of the fair young creature they had taken from him.

If Mormon Paul knew of the existence of a secret camp of exiles, which rumor had it was somewhere in the mountains, he said nothing of it to Hazel.

The girl was left to conjecture as to their destination until he told her in a fit of glee that he intended to put a sea between them and America.

Even then she did not suspect the truth, and the villain's words disclosed just enough to cause her to want to know more.

Not for a moment did the Mormon lose sight of his prey.

If he had known that the banded pards were already scouring the mountains in search of him, he might have quickened his steps.

He might have known this, for the thrilling events of the last few hours surely hinted that against him was lifted the hand of Gentile and Mormon.

When night came, Hazel felt the fingers of Mormon Paul about her wrist, and she was dragged on and on deeper all the while into the hills.

It was the night of Richard Redfire's adventures in Denver, and there crept out of a small canyon a dwarfish figure in whose head were set two glowing eyes.

This person—for the figure was human—had the stealthy tread of a cat, and as he went forward, hugging the walls like a shadow, he looked more like a fitting specter than like a man.

Down the trail he pushed to disappear where rock was piled on rock in wild confusion, and when he again emerged into the starlight it was far from the gulch.

"If I could only discover the result of my shot I would be satisfied," said the crawler aloud to himself. "Then I would know whether to venture back to the mountain cavern or whether to go on and on putting continually between my enemies and me mile after mile. If I killed Lucky Livingstone in Bumble, I will be hunted to the bitter end, and without mercy. A rope will follow me wherever I go. Chispa Chick wasn't far from wrong when he said that I'd need the head and hand of Don Domingo before very long. Don't I need 'em now? I wonder where the detective is to-night? If I knew, hang me, if I wouldn't take a bee-line to him."

Such language could fall from the tongue of but one person—Romeo, the hermit dwarf of the Silver Hills.

The speaker was Romeo.

When he halted where a path barely discernible crossed a trail well worn, he inspected the ground with the eye of a real sleuth.

"Hark! they are coming now!" he exclaimed, and the next moment he was back in the shadows.

With face turned toward the sleuth, Romeo watched and waited with breathless interest.

There came up through the little canyon a few rods away the voices of men, mingled now and then with the tread of many feet.

Romeo drew back still further and compressed his diminutive body into the smallest possible space, while one of his hands clutched the revolver with which he had lately staggered Lucky Luke among the cabins of Bumble.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, on came the unseen band.

Presently Romeo caught sight of a lot of moving figures, then he distinguished the stalwart Vigilantes as they marched shoulder to shoulder over the Denver trail.

Romeo knew every man.

A cry almost burst from his throat as he recognized the man whose slayer, until that moment, he thought he was.

After all, he had not taken a human life in Bumblebee City; the presence of Lucky Luke among the pards told him that fortune had interposed to save the handsome sport.

Romeo took in a breath of genuine relief when he saw this.

The pards halted at the cross-trails.

They seemed to recognize the spot.

"Here," said Lucky Livingstone, pointing toward the ground. "Here, if we believe what we hear, a trail leads to the retreat of the Mormon exiles."

A short silence followed.

"Who has followed it to the camp?" queried some one in the crowd.

"Not one of us, but that fact makes the existence of the retreat none the less sure," answered Lucky Livingstone.

"Do you believe in its existence?"

"I do."

"Have you ever seen any one who had been there?"

"I have not."

The men looked curiously at one another.

"How long is the trail from here?"

Lucky Luke shook his head.

"If Mormon Paul knows of the place—"

"His route proves it!" ejaculated Livingstone, putting a sudden check on the miner's words.

"He was making for it when arrested the first time in Bumblebee City, and again when overhauled at Deuce-o'-Diamonds. Yonder lies the trail to the man we want. If Mormon Paul is far enough ahead, we will find him in the camp of the exiles. Let all who will follow Lucky Livingstone step forward. Those who want to abandon the hunt with the Mormon fox uncaught will keep their tracks."

Romeo saw the tall figure of the tough of Deuce-o'-Diamonds move nimbly to one side, and the next moment the whole party stepped toward him.

This unanimity did not surprise the hermit sport. He knew the vengeful hearts of the men of the Silver Hills.

"Lucky Livingstone would not be so positive if he based his belief of the existence of the Mormon camp on a mere rumor," thought Romeo.

"I have heard of it, too. But I have seen men who have looked in vain for it. Of course, Mormon Paul won't go to Denver. He would not be a whit safer there than in Deuce-o'-Diamonds. They don't like the Saints more in one place than they do in the other. The Mormon must have some hiding spot in view, especially if he has in his clutches the fair person Lucky Luke and pards lately took from him."

The action of the pards in agreeing to follow Livingstone into the unknown land was followed by a consultation, every word of which fell distinctly upon Romeo's ears.

The little fellow was as motionless as a statue, wedged in between rock and tree.

He scarcely breathed.

Well did he know what would follow discovery by the men whose burly forms could be counted despite the uncertain light of the stars.

At last the band tramped off.

Romeo saw the twin captains, Lucky Livingstone and Solid Silver Dick, at the head of the toughs, and he noticed how close together they stepped, with their tongues going in low tones.

"I guess I can slip out now," laughed the sport of the Hills, sliding from his station and throwing a look after the vanishing band. "Will they find the Mormon camp, or is it a myth in spite of Livingstone's belief? If it exists Mormon Paul has fled to it, and Don Domingo, the detective, won't get to catch him there. This is a funny trail, in which a man whose profession is the catching of villains wants to save the neck of the prince of rascals. I confess I can't exactly see through it, but the sleuth ought to know what he is about."

Romeo followed the banded men of the mountains.

He seemed to realize the importance of Mormon Paul to the man who had crossed the continent for a purpose as yet not very well defined.

He knew that victory by the human hunters meant defeat for Don Domingo, and the hermit sport mentally resolved that they should not succeed if his wits could prevent.

The spy at the heels of the band had to be extremely careful.

He had forfeited all claims to mercy for his shot at Lucky Livingstone, among the cabins of Bumblebee City.

His life would not be spared, because his bullet had failed to take that of Lucky Luke. The almost victim himself would be judge, and Romeo, if caught, would suffer as swift a doom as that which had in advance been accorded Mormon Paul.

Such was the peril that faced Romeo when he threw himself upon the trail of the two captains and their cool-headed followers.

"Don Domingo would stand by me if he knew that for being his messenger I have drawn upon me the wrath of Bumblebee and Deuce-o'-Diamonds, and by the horned spoon, I intend to help him!"

Thus spoke Romeo when he had thought everything over, and reached a conclusion.

Besides, he had begun to have serious doubts about the Mormon's pretended identity.

To him even, as he had lately discovered for himself, Mormon Paul was more than simply an exiled Saint of the Church.

He was a man of two lives, and one of them had been lived in part far from the scene of present operations.

Richard Redfire, for whom as a detective Romeo had profound respect, would not try to rescue a Mormon from the halter for nothing.

"I'm going to the end of this mystery!" exclaimed the hermit sport. "The more I think about it, the more I want to find out. Lucky Livingstone and the pards must not hang Mormon Paul. It may cost me a close pull with life to prevent, but I'll be on hand when I'm not wanted."

The stars looked down that night on a lot of tireless, unrummuring men.

They saw, too, not far behind the spectral

band, a little figure that glided in and out among the shadows of the trail.

The latter was Romeo, with a single purpose in view—that of shadowing the Colorado Vigilantes over every inch of the trail.

Of course he was too far in the rear to hear the words exchanged by Mormon Paul's trackers.

He had lost sight of Lucky Livingstone and Solid Silver Dick, whom he saw last in front of the avengers, but he knew that the two bronzed captains were still at the head of the hunt.

The sun was above the horizon when Romeo saw, far down the mountain-slope, the figures he had followed with the pertinacity of a sleuth-hound.

The nimble little spy shaded his eyes with his hands, and watched the men who had halted where they could be plainly seen.

As he look he saw a dark figure drop from the lower boughs of a pine, and reach the crowd with a single leap.

"The man is going to report," thought Romeo, and then he watched the proceedings with renewed interest.

In another minute the entire band had vanished, and the hermit sport lost no time in reaching the observation tree.

With the nimbleness of a squirrel he went from limb to limb, until he was perched in the very top of the mountain pine.

When he had braced himself, Romeo looked east.

"By Jupiter! it was not a wild rumor, after all!" he exclaimed. "The camp of the Mormon exiles lies nearer than anybody thought, and the eagles will now get ready to swoop down on the fox they have treed."

The keen eyes of Romeo had discovered the roofs of a cluster of cabins, which could be nothing less than the hidden refuge of the Saints.

Lucky Livingstone and his pards had entirely vanished.

Romeo searched the landscape in vain for them, and when he came down from his perch they were still missing.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE EXILES' NEST.

THERE was more truth in the rumors concerning the hidden asylum for Mormon refugees than any one knew.

Romeo, from his perch in the tree, counted the roofs of half a dozen huts, and when he descended he believed he had discovered Mormon Paul's destination.

The sudden and unaccountable disappearance of the pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds was a mystery which the hermit-sport was not capable of solving.

He resolved, however, to get at the puzzle, if possible.

The secluded camp could not be seen from the ground at the foot of the tree, and when Romeo went forward it seemed a thousand miles away.

Meantime, the man whom the banded pards had trailed with such vindictiveness had found what he was inclined to call a safe hiding-place, for the present, at least.

It was full daylight when Mormon Paul and Hazel came suddenly upon the grouped cabins.

Suddenly, we say, for the camp was so situated that a person passing within a few hundred yards of it would have no idea that he was in the vicinity of a human habitation.

Romeo had counted the huts correctly; there were six, and they stood close together without any apparent regard for order.

They were small closely built cabins, and above the door of each were two small pieces of wood nailed together in the form of an X.

Not one of the buildings was without this peculiar designation, and the stranger would have been at a loss to know what it meant.

When Hazel caught sight of the camp for the first time she turned suddenly upon Mormon Paul, and saw his eyes glowing with unconcealed delight.

His look plainly told her that he had been aware of the existence of the camp, and the girl could not help speaking her thoughts.

"You have come straight here," Hazel said.

"Do you think so?" smiled the Saint.

"Everything proves it. The people of your camp cannot hate Mormons as the men of the other camps do."

"At last the Mormon exiles have found friends—friends even in Colorado," exclaimed Paul.

Friends! The word sounded strangely on the villain's lips, and grated singularly on the girl's ears.

Five minutes later Mormon Paul led his captive into the camp.

Suddenly a door opened directly ahead and Hazel saw a tall hatchet-faced man step forth. She did not have to look the second time to see in him the typical Mormon, but she wondered to see such a man in the heart of Colorado.

A quick look passed between Mormon Paul and the man. The latter made a signal with his hand and the hunted advanced with much assurance.

The girl's surprise was increased when she

saw the two men clasp hands, and then the stranger turned his eyes full upon her in a searching look.

Hazel said nothing, but submitted to being conducted into the cabin when she saw Mormon Paul and the other man withdraw to one corner.

"Can I be in a Mormon nest?" ejaculated the girl when she had watched these proceedings awhile. "Under what authority is a camp of Saints allowed to exist in Colorado? This is one of the mysteries I cannot fathom, but maybe Mormon Paul or the future will tell."

"I welcome you among us, sister," suddenly said the voice of the unnamed Mormon coming forward with extended hand from which Hazel involuntarily drew back.

"Who are you?" she asked, looking up into his face.

"Ah! she really does not know," laughed the man, glancing at Mormon Paul. "My sister, you are in the camp of the banished Saints of the church. It is in the heart of the kingdom of the Gentiles; but we are as safe here as if we had put a sea between us and the Secret Executioners of the Tabernacle."

"Yes, Hazel, the place of safety has been reached," put in Mormon Paul. "The men who inhabit this camp are exiles like ourselves. They have been banished by the same Tribunal that laid its hands on me. Here they have lived ever since the trials, and here, if discovered by Mormon or Gentile, they will sell their lives for a price that will make the buyers tremble."

"Oh, I see," said Hazel. "You men, Mormons all, have banded together for mutual security."

"That is it exactly," was the reply. "We have our laws here as we used to have them in the City of the Saints. The keen eyes of the soaring eagle—the sleuth of the skies—have failed to discover us. We can grow old and die in Camp Secret, and the outside world will be none the wiser for our having done so."

In a little while the cabin was invaded by other men who looked like Mormons.

One and all welcomed Mormon Paul with a heartiness that was not assumed, and the girl was forced to confess that the rascal had really found his way to the arms of a strong brotherhood.

At length all withdrew with the exception of a man who seemed to have been left behind by common consent.

He was the youngest member of the Mormon clan.

He took a stool and placed it near the door, after which he quietly seated himself with his back against the portal and his legs crossed.

"I am not to be permitted to crossed the threshold," thought the girl. "I am a prisoner in a double sense, and the Mormons are going to help Paul keep the bird he has caught."

For some moments the young Saint looked at Hazel in silence before he spoke.

"Are you the first Mrs. Mormon Paul?" he asked.

Hazel could not suppress a smile.

"I am neither the first nor the last," she answered.

"How?" cried the Mormon, leaning forward.

"You are a Mormon wife, eh?"

"I am not!"

"He claims you."

"As he hawk claims the bird he holds by main force!" cried Hazel. "It was a Mormon marriage which, in my eyes, is worse than none at all."

The young apostle grinned.

"More: the sentence that drove Mormon Paul from the Territory annulled all his marriages."

"It always does that. The officers of the Secret Tribunal want more wives than they have, and that is one of their ways of adding to their list."

"Mormon Paul never said so."

"But he knows it to be true. Then, my sister, you repudiate the marriage that was had in the church?"

"I reject it with loathing. I abhor the infamous doctrines of the Mormon religion. I was born Gentile, and my blood flows to-day through Gentile veins as much as it ever did."

Hazel's listener looked amazed.

"Why did they banish Mormon Paul?" he asked, leaning forward again with an anxious expression of countenance.

"You would not believe me were I to mention the charge."

"Is it so strange?"

"Not so strange as it is monstrous," said the girl.

"Tell me!" cried the young Mormon.

Hazel crossed the room to where he sat watching her like a hawk.

Leaning over him, she laid one hand softly on his shoulder and looked down into his face.

"Mormon Paul would heap upon me the deepest curses of his invention if he knew I breathed to a living soul even a mention of his crime," said she, while the young exile seemed to hang breathless on her words. "He had a blind wife."

"Mormon Paul had?"

"Yes."

"The first one I ever knew of a Mormon hav-

ing," was the reply. "Well, what of the blind wife?"

"I was coming to that. She actually loved Mormon Paul, and I believe he hated her because she did so. One day the blind wife disappeared. She passed from view as completely as though the earth had opened at her feet and swallowed her. She never came back."

Hazel saw the look of astonishment fade gradually from the young Mormon's face, and in its place appeared a curious smile.

"Is that all?" he exclaimed.

"All?" echoed Hazel. "In the name of holy Heaven, isn't that enough?"

The smile broadened on the Mormon's face.

"We don't call that much—we the exiles of Camp Secret, I mean," said he. "To tell the truth, girl, some of us stand charged with some pretty tough deeds."

"But with none so terrible as his!" Hazel cried.

"What did he do?"

"The Tribunal accused him of killing his blind wife."

"Just because the woman did not turn up, eh? Did they ever have proof that she was murdered?"

"No—"

"Jumped at conclusions and passed judgment, I see!" laughed the young exile.

The girl drew back from him with a glance of aversion.

"I thought it was something worse than that," he went on following up his own words.

"How could it be worse than—than murder?"

"Never mind. We can't go back on a brother who comes to us in need and with the sentence of the Tribunal on his head."

"Then you intend to receive Mormon Paul in spite of his past?"

"He is one of us—a brother in adversity."

The young girl drew back and looked silently at the man who pronounced these words with the coolness of a double-dyed villain.

"You may take him in, but you can't defend him against the avengers of two camps," she remarked.

"Who want him?"

"Deuce-o'-Diamonds and Bumblebee City?"

"Oh, the camps in the Hills!" exclaimed the Mormon, and then he laughed again.

"They will have to find us first, girl!" he continued. "That is something the eagle has not yet done."

"Wait and see! The men of the banded camps will not leave the trail till they have found their prey. They may be nearer than you think at this moment."

"And we are better armed than you dream."

"I am done," said Hazel. "If you can champion the cause of the adder of Mormondom, I lose faith in man."

"In Mormons especially, I presume," was the response, and then the speaker became serious.

"This is a part of our code: We never turn our backs on a brother exile. From the moment he enters our fold he is one of us; our blood commingles as it were, and we will drain our veins for him."

"You may have a chance to drain them!" exclaimed Hazel, and her eyes seemed to flash as the words dropped from her tongue.

"There is on the track of Mormon Paul a Nemesis who will not fail."

"Who is he, girl?"

"Never mind. And when the time comes Hazel the Gentile may strengthen his arm!"

"That time will never come!" replied the Mormon.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SWOOP OF THE NIGHT EAGLES.

FIVE days later.

The camp of the exiled Mormons still nestles where we saw it last, and no excitement seems to break the monotony that apparently exists there.

Mormon Paul mingles with the men who gave him asylum when he first came bringing with him the young girl who had been caught in one of the most infamous snares ever set for the young and innocent.

The men of the camp with the single exception of the young man who had questioned Hazel have not sought to know the cause of Mormon Paul's banishment. They are desperadoes after his own heart—cold, cruel men whose religion would not prevent them from robbing a stage or cutting a human throat.

It did not take Hazel long to discover the true character of the inmates of the camp.

Not for a single moment had she been unwatched. When the eyes of her Mormon persecutor were not fixed upon her, the keen orbs of others were, and she felt that the battle against fate was almost hopeless.

If she had known that the pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds and Bumblebee City had followed the Mormon, and that they had penetrated to within sight of Camp Secret, she would have wondered what had become of them.

Why had they held off five days when they knew that their prey was almost in their grasp?

Lucky Livingstone's men outnumbered the

occupants of the camp, they might have swooped down upon it like a lot of destroying angels, but all this time they had held aloof.

Romeo, too, had not shown up. If he was going to step between Mormon Paul and the mountain avengers, he had put forth no efforts in that direction. It was the night of the fifth day. With it came to Camp Secret a man whose cleanly shaven face and garb proclaimed him a disciple of the new doctrine—in other words, a Mormon.

He told a well-coined story of persecution and exile.

He had the signals which opened the door of asylum for him, and Hazel looking from the cabin window saw him for the first time talking to Mormon Paul, and Montjoy the acknowledged chief of the exiled clan.

But there was something the girl did not see.

When the new-comer walked to the little cabin to which he had been assigned by the Mormons, a gleam of satisfaction lighted up his eyes, and he laughed to himself after the manner of a man who is playing under cover a cool game of some kind.

"There's more than one way to get the fox out of the brake," he exclaimed. "If these Mormon vipers knew the truth, my head wouldn't be worth one of the hairs upon it. It took us some time to get down to business, but we're there at last. They're both here—Mormon Paul and the girl. He has fallen into the hands of fiends as desperate as himself. There would be blood shed if we were to come down upon them openly, and fight for the man we want. That would never do. We must get by stealth that which would cost us some good blood to obtain by force. After that I'll drop a piece of news where it will do most good. Within three weeks there won't be one log left on the other in this Mormon nest."

The man who spoke thus closed the door of the cabin gently behind him.

He struck a match and passed it twice across the little window alongside the door, then blew it out and remained in darkness.

To this singular proceeding with the match there was no response for some time.

At the end of thirty minutes a figure glided around the corner of the cabin and was admitted.

"The game is here, Jack," said the Mormon in a whisper. "It is hedged in by a lot of madmen and deadly six-shooters."

"Mormon tigers, eh?"

"Yes. Upon the head of every man the Church has at one time or another set a price. They have located here in the heart of Colorado, and have signs and oaths like any other band of brothers. The old fellow we caught on his way hither did not give us the wrong signals. Go back to the boys. See that every one is ready to strike. To-night at twelve you will come back, one by one, and no two over the same trail. I will play my role here. Thus far I have completely hoodwinked the Saints."

"They take you for a full-fledged Mormon, do they?"

"Yes, Jack."

"You have spun your tale to breathless groups, I presume?"

"I have told it straight any number of times. My holding of the signals settled the matter with the doubting ones."

"Did Mormon Paul inspect you?"

"A dozen times, from head to foot," was the reply, accompanied by a light chuckle. "I guess we have the death-call on the Utah fox this time. There is no Don Domingo near to give him a breathing spell and, as you know, we don't intend to take him back over the Hills just to get to pull him up to a certain limb. The sentence of the Court is: 'Death where caught!' Don't forget the hour, Jack; at twelve to-night. No sooner, no later."

The man who had crept to the cabin from the mountains beyond Camp Secret went away as silently as he had come, and after awhile the person left behind left the cabin and joined several men who were at cards around a rough table, with a tin lamp for an illuminator.

All three looked up at the visitor, and made room for him at the table.

The game was for small stakes, and progressed with varying fortunes for an hour and more.

At last the man who had joined the play announced, with a laugh, that he was flat broke. One of the others offered to lend him enough to continue the game, but he declined.

When he left the hut the eyes of three men followed him.

"What do you think of him?" asked one.

"He doesn't play much like a Mormon," was the reply. "Maybe he never lost his old ways. Did you notice how he dealt?"

"Yes."

"It was the Gentile way."

"I thought so, but he is one of us for all that."

"So he says."

There was a tinge of doubt in the speaker's voice, just enough to bring out the interrogative that dropped from the other's tongue.

"Don't you believe him Mormon?"

"Why should I doubt it? He has the grip, the signals and the pass-words. You know that

none but an exiled brother can have those. Our agent in Salt Lake gives them to all who incur the displeasure of the church, and who fall under the eye of the Tribunal."

"I guess you're right. Here; it is my deal!" and the next moment the cards were falling once more on the table at three places.

"A camp full of fools!" ejaculated the man who had just left the cabin. "I believe I'd make a tip-top Mormon, but I have no hankering after the Saint business, so I'll keep out of it for a while yet. Before morning these lost Pleiades of the Church will find something out, and the next time they won't call a man a Mormon by the cut of his cloth."

The night passed, till the hour of twelve had nearly arrived.

Only here and there a light showed that the camp was inhabited, and where it burned the hunted Saints were generally at cards.

Into the mountain retreat crept ghostly figures that made no noise.

No two came from the same direction, but all centered at one point—the cabin occupied by the last arrival at the Mormon camp.

By and by twenty-four men stood in the shanty, and the right hand of each held a six-shooter, ready for a fight of some kind.

The man who had played Mormon so well among the exiles, talked in low tones to the men who surrounded him. He issued certain commands, that were quietly received, and no replies made.

"It wants ten minutes of the time," said the leader of the band. "The fox is in the trap he has set for himself. The cabin has two compartments. Hazel, the girl, occupies one. In the other we will find halter food."

Then followed another consultation in whispers, and the cabin was deserted one at a time by its tenants.

Before twelve o'clock came a cordon of dark forms and surrounded the structure given up to Mormon Paul and Hazel by the exiles.

The very silence of death hung about the scene, and the secrecy with which the cabin had been surrounded proclaimed the resolute characters of the workers in the dark.

All at once a man stepped to the door.

Raising his hand, he rapped three times, after the manner of a signal.

The blows could not be heard far from the cabin on the outside, but they were loud enough to rouse any one on the inside.

For several seconds there was no response to the signal.

The man at the door was about to repeat, when it was opened, and the glimpse of a face was caught just beyond.

"Come out, brother," spoke the captain of the human shadows.

"No, come in," was the reply.

The next moment a hand flew at the throat of the man inside, and it was caught before he had a chance to cry out.

"Not a word!" hissed the captor. "You are once more in the clutches of justice, and a word from your lips will cost you your life where you stand!"

Then it was that three men glided into the cabin, and opened a small door which led to a room dark and apparently unoccupied.

"Hazel, get up," said one, and there was a movement in the gloom, and the voice of a startled young girl asking who was there.

"We are the Vigilantes of the banded camps," one of the men replied, and at the words there was an ejaculation of joy which was quickly suppressed.

"Have you secured Mormon Paul?" asked a female's voice.

"We have the viper of the Church. It has been a complete catch all around. This time there is to be no failure. Come, girl. We want to finish the job by stretching a Mormon neck."

When Hazel was conducted into the starlight by the men she saw the figure of Mormon Paul.

The hands of the Saint had been bound at his back and a handkerchief prevented him from making an outcry.

The twain exchanged looks, but neither spoke.

"Forward!" commanded the leader of the band, and the start was made.

"Why, the captain of the avengers is a Mormon!" thought the girl, staring at the smooth face and peculiar garb of the person who had just issued the order.

The next moment she was undeceived, for the captain of the night-hawks stepped nimbly to her side and said:

"Mormon Paul played a cute game at Deuce-o'-Diamonds, girl, but our little game of to-night is equal to his. Don't you think so?"

The voice was a revelation to Hazel, and when the man drew back before she could betray him with an ejaculation of surprise, she knew she had just looked into the face of Lucky Livingstone.

Mormon Paul realized his situation.

The men who crowded closely around him with drawn revolvers told him by their mien that he had fallen into the most merciless hands on the face of the earth.

He could only look and walk forward under guard watched by the eyes of twenty hawks, and in a position to be shot dead at any moment.

The tramp to the outskirts of Camp Secret was a silent one.

When the last cabin had been left behind, Lucky Livingstone wheeled upon the men at his back and said in thrilling tones:

"Now, Agents of Justice, do your duty!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR A DEAD MAN'S TATTOO.

In two seconds after Lucky Luke's speech a rope appeared before Mormon Paul's eyes, and in a twinkling a noose dropped over his head.

The men of the banded camp did not intend to mince matters the second time.

Hazel started toward the Mormon when she saw his peril, but a hand gently yet firmly held her back, and she looked into Solid Silver Dick's face.

"They'll do it in spite of you, miss," said the handsome sport and then he added: "I guess it's the quickest way out of the difficulty anyhow."

Already the rope had been thrown over the main branch of a tree that stood conveniently near, and Mormon Paul stood under the hasty gallows.

"Up with him!" sounded the voice of Lucky Livingstone once more, and Hazel turned away as a human body was jerked upward from the ground.

"Come," said a voice at her elbow and a hand touched her arm.

"The rope has freed you forever from the persecutions of the Mormon monster."

Before Hazel and Solid Dick had gone a dozen yards from the spot the tramp of men was heard and the following second the whole party came up.

"There was no digging out this time," smiled Lucky Luke as the girl caught the look he sent toward her in the starlight. "We cheated Don Domingo, the Yankee sleuth, out of the prey he claimed. He might have known that he could not play successfully against the pards of two camps."

More than once Hazel's thoughts went back to the scene she had just witnessed. She did not have to look back to see a human body dangling from a tree, with filtered starlight falling on a ghastly upturned face.

Free at last!

The thought affected the young girl strangely.

These mountain men have not only broken my bonds, but they have baffled the detective who would have saved Mormon Paul's life for a purpose of his own," the girl said to herself. "How can I meet Don Domingo, as they call him, and tell him that I did not lift my voice for the Mormon's life when he stood under the tree and on the brink of eternity?"

"Do you want to go back now?"

The question broke the girl's meditations.

"Back where?" she exclaimed.

"Back to Utah," responded Solid Silver Dick. "Merciful heavens! no. Anywhere but there!" she cried. "I would like to put a world between me and the land of the demon Saints. You will not take me back to Utah?"

"Not for the world!" laughed the Deuce-o'-Diamonds sport. "You should not go thither even if it was your choice. Pardon me for saying this; but you were never born for a Mormon's harem."

It was with considerable difficulty that the men of the mines were persuaded to quit the camp of the exiles without showing their hatred of everything Mormon in a manner calculated between the two races.

If Lucky Livingstone had lifted a finger, the toughs would have turned back into Camp Secret, and the revolver would have stirred the to widen the breach echoes of the night.

"The camp is doomed," whispered Livingstone to the eager avengers. "Now that the way to it has become known, it can't exist long."

The men were forced to be content with this, and the shrewd policy of the Mormon-hater of Deuce-o'-Diamonds held back a score of merciless hands.

More than once during the tramp across the mountains, Hazel found herself watched alternately by the rival captains of the Vigilantes, Lucky Livingstone and Solid Silver Dick.

Now one would be walking at her side, now the other.

"Was that man really Mormon Paul?" a voice said, so close to her that she started at the sound of it as much as at the language.

"He called himself such," she said, glancing up to see that her interrogator was Lucky Luke.

"You never knew him as any one else, save as Felix Filbert, the name he gave when he first brought you to Bumblebee City in the old wagon?"

Hazel gave the man a puzzling look.

He was talking in earnest, as if he had suddenly taken a great interest in the man who had been executed at his command.

"He was always Mormon to me."

"Did you ever hear of one Cartouche?"

Lucky Luke's eyes were fastened upon the girl, and he seemed to draw off and look at her strangely between his finish and her reply.

"Tell me the truth, girl; I want to know," he

went on. "What do you know about Cartouche?"

Hazel smiled.

"I have a singular recollection of that name," said she.

"What is it?"

"It was while I was an inmate of the covered wagon in which we—Mormon Paul and I—were flying from the vengeance of the Secret Tribunal. One night I fell asleep in the vehicle when the Mormon had possession of the lines. A singular dream broke my slumber, and on opening my eyes I beheld Mormon Paul fast asleep on the seat, and the mules standing still on a wild trail. In a moment a thought of escape rushed through my mind. I instantly formed a plan to gain my freedom, and was about to put it into execution, when my persecutor started up with an exclamation: 'Back! sleuth-hounds of the law! It is death to lay hands on the person of Cartouche!' These were the words that fell from the Mormon's lips to impress themselves vividly on my mind. I fell back into the gloom that covered my couch on the bottom of the wagon, but I did not close my eyes."

"In a moment Mormon Paul was bending over me and I felt his breath on my cheeks as he tried to discover whether I had not been disturbed by the startling words. I believe it would have been death for me to have betrayed myself that time. I felt so then at any rate. At last I heard him say: 'I guess she didn't hear anything, and she can thank fortune she did not,' and as he turned away I drew a full breath of relief. That is how I came to hear of Cartouche."

Lucky Livingstone received Hazel's story with a smile.

"He never spoke the name again, did he?"

"Not in my presence."

"What did you think, girl?"

"About the incident of the wagon?"

"Yes."

"My thought was, I recollect, that Mormon Paul had been disturbed by a bad dream, and that awakening at the climax, he unwittingly spoke a name which at one day may have been his."

"That is good reasoning," answered Lucky Luke.

"You have heard of Cartouche?" Hazel asked.

"I? Yes, I know something of the man," he said.

"Then there was a Cartouche?"

"The prince of plotters in the city of Paris! If I thought we had followed him up instead of merely Mormon Paul, I don't know but I would go back."

"Your victim is dead now."

"Dead as a herring! I wish you had told me this before, Hazel."

"You never asked me."

"Would you have given me this information when you were in Deuce-o'-Diamonds?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! I see what a fool I've been." And then Lucky Livingstone lapsed into silence and said no more to Hazel for a long time.

In a little while she heard no one at her side and when she looked for Livingstone he was gone.

"Owlet Oll?"

"Well, captain?"

"Are you afraid to go back?"

"Back whar?"

"Back to the man we pulled up—the Mormon priest?"

The stalwart man whom Lucky Luke had addressed was silent, but for a second only.

"If you say it's go back, back it is," he said, with resolution.

"Then you leave us here. Listen, Owlet. I want the body of Mormon Paul searched."

"The corpse, captain?"

"The corpse."

"What do you want to know?"

"In the first place, you are to give the clothes a complete overhauling."

"The brethren have done that themselves, no doubt."

"Quite likely; but your search must be thorough. If the body is in a mountain graveyard, as it doubtless will be by the time you get back, it must be exhumed."

"I'm ter hold a sort o' post mortem on Mormon Paul, am I?"

"Call it what you like."

"We might have searched the body after the performance under the tree."

"I did not know then—what I think I know now," and the way Livingstone caught himself made Owlet Oll venture a smile. "You are listening, Owlet? Go back to the dead man, wherever he is. If you find nothing on his clothes, no papers nor writing of any kind, you will look at the skin of the right arm, under side, near the shoulder."

"For what?" cried Owlet.

"For a mark, a peculiar tattoo, which I can describe to you no better than to say that it resembles a letter C with a dagger crossing it from top to bottom."

"I never heard of a tattoo like that," frankly said Owlet Oll.

"No two men ever wore it," was the response.

"I want to know whether or not it is on the flesh of the man we lynched in the shadow of the Mormon camp."

"If I see the tattoo there you may want more proof than mere word of mouth?"

"You can fetch me the tattoo."

Owlet Oll gave vent to a little cry and stared ludicrously at Lucky Livingstone a moment.

"You have never failed me yet, Owlet," continued the Mormon-hater, touching his man's arm lightly with his finger before a word of remonstrance could be framed. "Be off at once. Remember! if the tattoo is where it may be—on the arm of Mormon Paul—I want it."

Owlet Oll's bronzed hand touched the brim of his sombrero, and the following moment the band tramping over the mountain lost a member.

Lucky Livingstone looked once at the figure that vanished while he gazed, and then went back to the head of the pards, where he saw Solid Silver Dick walking beside the rescued girl.

"If I had known this before, I wouldn't be sending Owlet back after a dead man's tattoo," he said to himself. "I couldn't send a better man, though. When Owlet reports I will know whether Richard Redfire will ever catch his man."

Owlet Oll pushed rapidly over the back trail. He was a man who never lagged on the path of duty, and when once on a trail assigned him by the man whom he called leader, he did not stop short of success.

Lucky Livingstone's messenger reached the vicinity of Mormon Paul's last adventure with the sun of noonday glowing overhead.

He sought out the identical tree, but found no body swinging from the fatal branch.

Owlet Oll was not astonished.

He reasoned that the Mormons had discovered the corpse, taken it down, and given it burial.

But he must know more than this.

He had been commissioned to find the body, to dig it up if buried, and to look for a strange tattoo under the right arm.

Owlet loitered about the camp till nightfall.

When darkness came he crept into the place and stood among the spectral cabins.

"Halt, there!" suddenly rung out a voice that stopped Owlet in his tracks.

Lucky Livingstone's spy reached for his revolver, but as his hand touched the weapon a sharp report cut the air, and he pitched forward—dead!

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORMON MYSTERY.

SUCH was the sudden and terrible fate of the man whom Lucky Livingstone sent back to solve the mystery that surrounded Mormon Paul's identity.

If he had gone back in person, instead of sending Owlet Oll, a like doom might have been his, and our story would have been despoiled of one of its characters.

As it was, Lucky Luke was permitted to tramp on while his spy was trundled without ceremony to the mountain cemetery where he had expected to exhume the corpse of the Mormon priest.

Deuce-o'-Diamonds received the avengers and Hazel the rescued in due course of time.

The girl was again domiciled in her old quarters, and Livingstone waited with impatience for the coming of his spy.

During this period he was not idle. He continued to circulate where he thought it would do some good, the truth about the existence of the camp of exiles among the mountains.

His messengers appeared simultaneously in several mining-camps, and spread the reports with an industry that deserved a better cause.

In a little while a band of Vigilantes came together, and one night it took up its march across the mountains.

The men of Colorado went forward with determined purpose.

The very name of Mormon was a stench in the nostrils of all, and the acts of Mormon Paul which had been spread abroad by Lucky Livingstone's men had served to intensify their hatred.

The time came when the avengers crept down on the silent camp like a lot of merciless redskins.

Darkness hung over the scene, and the stillness of death was not broken by their tread.

What did they find?

Here and there stood a cabin with the crossed sticks above the door, but not one was occupied.

The Gentiles, who opened the portals with cocked revolvers in their hands, found empty nests for all their pains.

The camp of the exiles was deserted; the birds had flown.

It is needless to say that the chagrin and rage of the Vigilantes knew no bounds.

They had come for blood, but there was not a drop for them to spill.

Curses filled the air.

The mountain had been crossed—for what? To find a lot of Mormon nests with not a single feather in them.

In a little while a flame leaped through the roof of one of the cabins, then another and another.

Bronzed hands carried torches from hut to hut.

A freshening wind blew in the right direction, and soon the camp was a mass of roaring flame.

The disappointed men stood off and looked silently on.

If they could not pluck the hawks they could destroy their nests, and that was something.

It was night when the men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds who had accompanied the expedition came back.

Lucky Livingstone was alone in his shanty when the door opened softly, and he saw one of the returned pards.

"What about Owlet?" asked the boss of the camp.

The man shook his head.

"What! didn't you find anything?" cried Livingstone.

"Nothing about Owlet Oll," was the reply.

"Couldn't you force the truth from the Mormon dogs?"

"There were no Mormons to tell us anything. The camp was empty."

Lucky Luke sprung up.

"They caught Owlet!" he exclaimed. "The fellow was not able to carry out his instructions. Did you find their cemetery?"

"I found it."

"Well?"

"There was one fresh mound."

"You opened it?"

"Yes."

"And found—what?"

"A headless trunk."

"Mormon Paul's, do you think?"

"I cannot say."

"Did you look for the tattoo?"

"The right arm was inspected; but there was no mark there."

Lucky Luke was silent for a moment, and the man moved toward the door.

"Why didn't you follow the Mormon's trail?" he suddenly asked.

"We did—till we lost it," grinned the Vigilante.

"A headless trunk, and nothing under the arm?" mused Livingstone, when he had dismissed the man. "Would they serve a brother in that manner? They must have found Mormon Paul swinging from the limb where we left him, and as a matter of course they gave him burial. But the missing head? What does it mean?"

Unable to answer himself satisfactorily, Lucky Livingstone left the cabin disturbed.

Down the main street at that moment came the distinct tread of a horse.

"Hello!" he cried, as the animal was pulled up in front of him and he recognized the man who leaned toward him from the saddle.

"Just the man I'm looking for!" came the response. "You fellows can't hang a man worth a cent."

A sardonic laugh accompanied the words, and the next second Lucky Luke was at the saddle, with his eyes riveted on the man above—Chispa Chick, the head man of Bumblebee City.

"What do you mean, captain?" demanded Livingstone. "We haven't tried to hang but one man lately—"

"And you bungled that job."

"How?"

Chispa Chick bent lower, and there was very little space between the faces of the two men when he spoke again.

"If the object I saw last night was no ghost, Mormon Paul is still able to do some mischief!"

Lucky Luke uttered a strange cry, and fell back, but in an instant he darted forward, and his fingers seemed to sink into Chispa Chick's flesh as he cried:

"That hanged hound alive? By Jove! this is too much! I gave the orders that pulled him up, and my last look back saw him dangling between star and ground."

"So the boys say," answered the pard of Bumblebee, another quiet smile at his mouth.

"Did you instruct any of your men to look for Mormon Paul when the expedition went back to the camp?"

"I did. They were to examine a certain corpse in the cemetery."

"Well?"

"They found a headless body."

"Which was not the one I saw last night!" laughed Chispa Chick.

"How near were you to the apparition?"

"I saw it for three minutes. When it walked away there was a sound of footsteps."

"Then it must have been flesh and blood."

"It was. I tell you Mormon Paul has again cheated the noose."

"To be caught at last by Don Domingo, the detective?"

"I can't answer that."

"By heavens! he shall not be!" cried Lucky Livingstone, and his clinched fist smote Chispa's horse till the animal winced. "I want to get even with the man who is to me, as I have told you, Monsieur Ledocq, the Yankee ferret, once attached to the Parisian police. I would give more than you think, Captain Chispa, to baffle

that man who has crossed the continent after Mormon Paul."

"For what?"

"Ah! he believes him to be Cartouche."

Chispa Chick's eyes seemed to dilate.

"What makes Cartouche so important to the shadow?"

"Never mind! He shall never catch him!"

He may be on the trail now. A man pulled up to a limb with his hands tied on his back seldom frees himself. Mormon Paul was tied thus the boys tell me."

"So he was."

"But he was not hanged."

"You say he was not."

"The evidence of my eyes is enough for me! Lucky Luke, if you want to get ahead of Mormon Paul and Don Domingo, you must not go to sleep. By the way, you have not caught the mountain hermit who nearly finished you with a revolver in Bumblebee City."

"Romeo?" and Livingstone spoke the name through his teeth. "I shall pay the imp back in his own coin when I am ready to devote some time to him. He won't spoil. We go back to the Mormon priest. Who cut him down before life was extinct?"

"A brother, perhaps."

"We made the swoop in silence."

"There might have been a watchful eye. Those Mormon dogs are keen fellows."

Lucky Luke walked off as if a sudden thought had driven him.

"Wait for me a moment!" he said, over his shoulder to Chispa Chick and then he vanished.

In less than five minutes he returned, a glow of triumph visible in his eyes.

"Hazel is still here," said he. "If Mormon Paul escaped, I would look for him here first. He would want the girl, you know."

"If he has not given her up."

It did not taken Deuce-o'-Diamonds long to learn that Mormon Paul had reappeared in Bumblebee City.

"Let the sleuth have his men," growled several.

"Not while the hand of Lucky Luke can come between!" was the response. "I told him when we parted last that I would one day baffle him in his greatest game, and I shall do it if I have to shoot Cartouche dead in his hands."

"Cartouche?"

"I mean Mormon Paul," corrected Livingstone, starting slightly. "From this moment I devote my time to beating the man who came from New York to win a game for a woman who wants to know who she is."

There were strange whisperings among the pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds when Lucky Livingstone tramped away and shut the door of his cabin hard behind him.

At that very moment two figures were passing over a certain trail between the two camps.

They were men, and both were afoot.

One led a horse by the bridle, and while he walked on he listened to the rapidly moving tongue of his companion who was much smaller in stature than he, and was, besides, ill-shaped, like a dwarf.

"I want to thank you again, Romeo," the leader of the horse said when the little man had reached the end of a sentence. "You did me a great service when you leaned over the very limb up to which the avengers pulled Mormon Paul and cut him loose. Sybil the Nameless will give you more than thanks one day for that opportune work. I am once more on the trail, and now I will show the banded pards why I wanted the Mormon priest rescued from the halter. He can escape me now."

"I'm glad to hear that, Don Domingo," cried Romeo. "I did the best I could. If I could have held the man I cut down, I would have done so."

"Of course."

"If you have left Sybil safe in Denver you can devote your time to Mormon Paul. But beware. The banded camps are against you as they are against him. The next time the revolver will finish the Mormon; the pards won't trust the noose any more."

Romeo saw a smile pass over the face of the man he addressed.

"He doesn't intend to be baffled. I see that," the dwarf thought to himself. "It is one man against a hundred. The odds are against him; but I like his grit. He will take Mormon Paul from the tigers of the hills. I would bet my last dollar on Don Domingo!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A REJECTED PROPOSITION.

WE left Richard Redfire face to face with Silken Grip on the streets of Denver; we have found him again between the banded camps with Romeo for a companion.

Silken Grip had recoiled from the menacing revolver of the level-headed sleuth and when he walked away the words "Track me and die!" still rung in his ears.

It was not his intention to have a personal collision with the detective who had crossed the continent for his man. Rather, he wanted to discover Sybil whom he believed to be secreted

somewhere in Denver, and he was glad to get off as easily as he did, and glad, too, to see Richard ride south with determined visage.

"Good-by, Monsieur Ledocq!" laughed Silken Grip ere the detective disappeared. "May you have your hands full hunting for Cartouche. In truth, I think you will as the rival camps yearn for the man who wanted to save Mormon Paul from the noose."

It was true that Chispa Chick had seen the living victim of the lynchers' rope in Bumblebee City.

The keen eyes of the mountain boss had not deceived him.

He was not aware of the circumstances of the exiled priest's miraculous escape.

But two living persons knew that the tree to whose bough Lucky Luke and his men had swung Mormon Paul held at the time of the execution of the sentence the agile figure of Romeo, the hermit sport.

The executioners had scarcely vanished when the little man bending down knife in hand severed the cord, and let the almost dead man fall heavily to the ground.

Another minute and Mormon Paul would have been past help.

Romeo conducted his prisoner from the scene at the muzzle of a revolver.

He had sworn to prevent the pards of the united camps from taking the Mormon's life, and he intended to keep his word.

"That man shall live to reward Don Domingo for his chase across the continent!" he exclaimed. "He shan't be hung while he holds the secret which the detective believes he possesses."

The resuscitated man had no notion of remaining long under guard.

All at once Romeo found himself minus a prisoner, and the last he saw of Mormon Paul was something human in shape that disappeared among some bushes with a revolver bullet whistling uncomfortably near his head.

Mormon Paul went back to Camp Secret after a spell of hiding in the mountains.

He found the cabins empty—the Mormon hawks gone.

"My abduction by Lucky Luke and his pards has cleared the camp," he thought to himself. "The camp is known now, and further residence there would be foolhardy."

Once more the man known as Mormon Paul, but believed to be Cartouche as well, was a fugitive from the shadow of a mountain galls.

"By Jupiter! I'm in demand!" fell from his tongue when he walked coolly out of Bumblebee City, observed, though he knew it not, by Chispa Chick. "These Colorado chumps think me the occupant of a little graveyard and pastall power of doing harm. They are yet to learn that the hand they think nerveless has the strength of a lion's paw. They put me out of the way as Mormon Paul. I have come back as Cartouche! There's more than one marked shanty in yonder camp, and across the divide are several more!"

Chispa Chick rode back from Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

He entered Bumblebee City at sundown and leaned over Durg's bar with a glass of liquor between him and the light.

Half an hour later he was an inmate of the best known cabin in the camp, and its sole occupant.

The night grew darker and darker, and before long the sky was covered with a mass of clouds that effectually hid the stars.

Chispa Chick discussed some of the contents of the cabin larder, and was about to turn away when several peculiar raps sounded on his door.

His voice bade the visitor enter and as he fixed his gaze on the portal it opened revealing the face and figure of Moro, Silken Grip's companion.

Chispa Chick was surprised to see the man back.

"Are you alone?" asked Moro taking in the interior of the cabin at a glance as well as he could as he advanced.

Chispa Chick said "Yes," and Moro spoke again somewhat reassured.

"What will you give for the man who got away from you a short time ago?"

"Mormon Paul!" exclaimed Chispa.

"Yes."

"We are not very particular about him," was the answer.

"Maybe the Mormon dog deserves the few days before him."

"I thought you intended to hang him once?"

"So we did."

"Now you want him to live out his time?"

"I have not said so. What do you know about Mormon Paul?"

Moro smiled.

"He isn't the man I thought he was," he said after a brief silence.

"Ha!" cried Chispa Chick. "Then you thought him a man of two lives?"

"Honestly, I did, Captain Chispa. Having discovered my mistake, I am going away; but first I thought I would offer you your late prisoner if you wanted him."

"You have him, then?"

"Not exactly, but I can place him in your hands."

"When?"

"Within thirty minutes."

"Alive?"

"Alive, if you show courage and discretion."

"For whom have you mistaken Mormon Paul?"

The question did not seem to take Moro by surprise.

"For one Cartouche," he said promptly.

"It is always Cartouche!" laughed Chispa Chick. "Are you sure he is not that person?"

"I am. A few days ago I was almost convinced that I had rediscovered—Let me say, Cartouche. Now I believe him to be solely Mormon Paul, an exiled Saint and guilty of a thousand crimes."

"There are others who still consider him Cartouche," said Chispa Chick.

"I believe that."

"Don Domingo for instance."

"The Yankee ferret of M. Claude's secret police of Paris!" cried Moro. "Yes, Captain Chispa, Richard Redfire believes he has found the trail of Cartouche, but he has only struck scent of the Mormon fox. A fine outcome for a man whose boast used to be that he never followed a blind trail. The fox has followed a dead hare. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mormon Paul was here since his escape," remarked Chispa Chick.

"In this camp?"

"Right here, in Bumblebee City. I could have shot him down then."

"But you did not?"

"No; he walked off with his body unperforated. I'm tired of the Mormon Paul business. If I thought he was Cartouche, I'd like to hold him as a bait for the detective, for, by my head! I wouldn't care to entrap the man who wanted to rescue the Mormon from the halter."

Moro seemed disappointed with the non-success of his mission.

"If you don't want the man I'll not betray him," said he. "He is yours if you wish to make up for the failure of some time ago."

Chispa Chick shook his head.

"All right, Captain Chispa," smiled Moro.

"The man may be on a vengeance-hunt. If he is, you may regret your leniency. If he were Cartouche, I wouldn't be here offering to throw him into your hands. You have made your choice. Good-night, Chispa."

Once more the bronze boss of Bumblebee City was alone, and the figure of Moro disappeared toward one side of the camp.

"Can it be that the sleuth is the hoodwinked one?" muttered the Chick. "Has he followed from New York, as Moro would intimate, a man who is not the person he wants? Which is the deceived—Moro or Don Domingo? I could have had Mormon Paul for a nod of the head. Time was when I would have given a good deal for the wretch; but now I don't intend to bother about the dog."

If Moro had divulged his secret at Durg's hotel, or even to any man other than Chispa Chick, he would have been applauded for the information.

In a few minutes he would have found himself in the midst of a crowd of wild men demanding to be led at once to the wily Mormon who twice had miraculously escaped the noose.

But Moro did nothing of the kind.

He kept from the camp till he found a horse among the gloomy shadows of rock and tree, and springing to saddle he was soon riding from the scene.

"Bumblebee and Mormon Paul for it!" rippled over his lips. "I offered Captain Chispa the man merely for the taking of him. If he refuses the refusal he must not blame me. Now I can go back to Silken Grip. The fortnight has not expired, though Sybil has been found by her secret sleuth."

It did not take Moro long to place many mountain miles between himself and the camp he had just left.

He turned the head of his steed toward Denver and rode fast with his thoughts for his companions.

Chispa Chick at last blew out the light in his shanty and after awhile the silence of mountain came down on Bumblebee City.

The nightly gamblers of the place played till past the uncanny hours, and then slipped to their cabins through the dark minutes that precede the dawn.

More than one of them passed Chispa Chick's cabin, but not one stopped to look after its inmate.

At length the first flushes of a new day appeared at the tip of the horizon, then the morning brightened till the eastern sky was red.

Chispa Chick did not come forth; the door of his shanty remained ominously closed.

It was seven o'clock when a pard knocked at the portal.

Getting no response, he went to the little window and peered in.

One look was enough.

"Great heavens!" leaped from his throat as he sprung to the door again, and the next minute he was inside.

The light that streamed inside the place showed the pard of Bumblebee City a sight ghastly enough to appall the stoutest man.

Sitting bolt upright on a wooden stool with one wrist tied to the heavy oak table to keep him from falling was the body of Chispa Chick.

The eyes had an awful stare, the face was ghastly, with a track of blood over the chin.

And in the bosom a knife was buried to the hilt!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WATCHING FOR THE TIGER.

THE pards of Bumblebee City were thunder-struck.

In less than ten minutes after the horrid discovery the entire camp had looked in at the door, and a thousand fierce curses had rent the air.

Some time elapsed before any one touched the man tied to the table and dead of course.

At length some one cut the rope, and the body of Chispa Chick pitched backward and fell to the floor.

There was another cry of horror and fresh oaths and vows of vengeance.

Not one of the many thought that Mormon Paul had come back.

In fact, how could a hanged man do such work as that? Of course it was impossible.

If the Chick had accepted Moro's proposition, the destroyer could not have accomplished his bloody work.

Now he had taken vengeance and was away.

By and by the little cabin had but one occupant and that one was dead.

A terribly in earnest indignation meeting was held at Durg's, and it was resolved to hunt the assassin down.

Then it was that one of the pards made a statement which he had not breathed before. He thought he had seen the ghost of Mormon Paul in camp—it was the night before the murder—but now he believed he had seen the living apostle of the Church, and ventured the assertion that the death of Chispa Chick was the beginning of his work of revenge.

The man was hooted at at first, but one after another came round to his belief, and before long he had the whole camp at his back.

Mormon Paul had killed Chispa Chick. Woe to the red-handed Saint!

The trail that presented itself to the avengers was almost no trail at all.

By dint of much searching the bronzed detectives found footprints which did not belong to any member of the camp. They traced them to where the murderer had apparently mounted a horse, and then it was a question of boots and hoofs.

The trail was followed to a point where the Denver road was reached, and there the human sleuth-hounds discovered a new and fresh track leading into the mountains.

The hooftracks were abandoned for the bootmarks, for a measurement of the latter convinced the men that they belonged to Mormon Paul.

"The wolf may come back to-night," suddenly cried one of the band. "What did the fellow say just before we pulled him up outside of the Mormon nest?"

"Wasn't it his prayers, Monterey?"

"Not much. I was standing close to him with my hands on the cord, waiting for the signal. 'When I start in,' hissed he, 'it'll be at the beginning—the captains first!'"

"Did he say that?"

"Through his teeth under the limb."

"Well, Chispa Chick was one of the captains."

"The first one he encountered in Colorado. Had it not been for Chispa, he and Hazel, his victim, would not have been unmasked at Durg's that night. Now, the wolf will come back, I say."

"He will go to Deuce-o'-Diamonds next. The other captains are there—Lucky Livingstone and Solid Silver Dick."

The band was divided on this point.

A portion stuck to the trail, the others went back.

Never before had Bumblebee City known such a night of excitement as the one which followed Captain Chispa's death.

To all appearances the return of the mysterious slayer was not expected, but the camp had never been more awake.

There were silent and motionless sentries at every road. Men stood in the shadows with the eyes of night-hawks, and with their fingers at the triggers of revolvers.

"He won't come," ventured one guard in a whisper to the comrade who shared with him one of the loneliest posts of the night.

"I know it."

"Mormon Paul was hanged till he was dead. There is another man at work—one of Chispa Chick's old enemies."

"But the footprints in the mountain puzzle me. They measured like the Mormon's."

"That was all."

"Then you don't call them his?"

"I do not."

Suddenly there came a noise down the trail.

which lost itself among the shadows a few yards beyond the sentry post.

The men glanced at one another and listened. The noise, when it was repeated, developed into a footfall, and a moment later voices smote the ears of the guards.

"Go forward and discover what you can," said one of the voices. "The pards of Bumblebee may know something about him. Don't get yourself into trouble, for since your last escapade in camp you have lost friends. Have your senses about you while you are in the nest. Remember that I can't spare the man who had rendered me the service you have. Now go."

"One moment, captain," responded the other voice.

"Well?"

"At the end of an hour where shall I find you?"

"Here."

The following minute a single footfall approached the two guards of Bumblebee City.

They drew back into the deeper shadows and waited.

In a little while a figure glided past.

"Let him go. I know the atom," whispered one of the men. "Can it be that he is the wolf we have been waiting for?"

"It is Romeo."

"Yes, and the man he has left is—"

"Don Domingo! Ah! the sleuth who wanted to rescue Mormon Paul is back."

"After his man!"

By this time the figure called Romeo's had disappeared toward camp, but there was no one on its track.

"The mountain hermit is in the net. He is the spy of the man who waits for him yonder. We want Don Domingo. He is almost as valuable to us as the Mormon."

The two guards doubted not that the detective was where Romeo had left him.

"Once in the hands of Bumblebee City, and the Two Worlds' Detective, as Lucky Luke calls him, is doomed! What do we care for his quest? We know that he even demanded the unconditional release of Mormon Paul. That is enough."

"You are right, Monterey. We need no bloodhounds among us. When Romeo comes back, which he never may, he need not find his master here. This Don Domingo is a man of two names. He may have a dozen, for all we know. Livingstone knows him well, and Lucky Luke makes no mistakes."

Let us follow Romeo for the present.

The little sport, cool headed and perfectly fearless, went forward, knowing that he was thrusting himself into a dangerous place.

The death of Chispa Chick was one of the startling events of which he had no knowledge; but he was soon to discover that a tragedy had been enacted in the camp.

Fully in the service of Richard Redfire, the detective, Romeo was bent on carrying out his instructions.

"The Chick is the man to put me on the trail," thought Romeo. "I need see nobody here to-night but Captain Chispa. He need not know that Don Domingo is in the shadow of the shanties. I am not here to give the detective away."

Romeo went straight to the dead man's cabin. His footfalls gave forth no alarm; he was at the door and his hand touched the wooden latch.

Just inside, with his elbow touching the logs, stood the death-watch of Bumblebee City.

The giant-like figure of the sport was almost as dark as the logs themselves, and the knife which he drew at the slight click of the latch sent out no gleams of light, for the lamp had not been lighted since Chispa's death.

Ignorant of all this, Romeo glided into the jaws of death, and stood at the mercy of a pair of eyes that saw him by the light admitted by the opening of the door.

The dwarf of the mountains paused a moment beyond the threshold.

He listened for the regular breathings of a man, but heard nothing, for the human tiger at his elbow had stifled his breath.

"Chispa!—Chispa Chick!" called Romeo in guarded tones as he leaned forward.

The response came in a manner unexpected and startling.

All at once a hand that closed as it touched, came down upon Romeo like the swoop of an eagle, and in a second he was fast!

"Ho! it is I, Captain Chispa!" ejaculated the dwarf with a laugh. "Strike a match and look into the face of an old friend."

The suggestion was obeyed, but not by the hand expected by Romeo.

The following second a lucifer snapped and flashed against the logs and the hermit sport recoiled the length of an arm and gave vent to a low cry of astonishment when he looked up into the face of—Big Ajax, the most merciless man of Bumblebee City!

"I will show you Chispa Chick!" continued the tough, and then Romeo was dragged across the room and forced to bend over the ghostly face of the Mormon's victim.

"My God!" cried the Colorado dwarf. "Whose work is this?"

"Whose, but the man who was championed

by your friend, the sleuth of two worlds! Now, Master Romeo, let me show you something else!"

The little man could not resist.

He was hurried from the cabin, then down the street, and in a little while found himself carried into the presence of a dozen men in the bar-room of Durg's Hotel!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DWARF'S RUN.

"CHISPA CHICK was no false prophet," flashed through Romeo's mind. "If ever I needed the strong arm and cool head of Richard Redfire, I need them now. But I fear they would not save me from the wrath of the men of Bumblebee."

The mountain hermit was placed on the floor before the dark-faced pards who surged forward with menace in their looks, but the grip of Big Ajax did not relax.

"Stand the young hunch up on the counter. We all want a whack at him!"

A moment later Romeo was lifted up and placed on the counter in full view of all.

"Now go for him, boys," laughed Ajax.

In an instant a perfect storm of questions was fired at Romeo.

They came so thick and fast that he could not separate one from the other, and for awhile he met them in silence with a ludicrous smile at his lips.

Ajax's story was enough to inflame the crowd against Romeo.

He had been caught in Chispa Chick's shanty. Was he the assassin and not Mormon Paul?

The excited pards of the mountain camp wanted a victim, and were ready to believe anything.

Romeo protested his innocence in firm voice, but he refused to tell what had brought him back to Bumblebee City.

This reservation was against him.

"Oh, give him ten feet up the street," some one said. "It'll give the rat a chance, anyhow. The night's neither too dark nor too light. We'll promise not to more than wing him."

The proposition was greeted with applause.

Big Ajax looked at Romeo.

"You understand that?" he said.

"I do."

"Are you willing to try the gantlet?"

"If you force it on me, I must submit."

The pards demanded the trial.

They were not to be cheated.

Romeo was led from the hotel with his arm still encircled by the fingers of Ajax the giant. He knew the full meaning of the ordeal to which he was to be subjected.

It meant simply a run from twenty revolvers, and it was not at all probable that they would spare him in his flight.

"Ready!" suddenly said the voice of Ajax.

Romeo heard the ominous clicking of revolvers on every side.

"Give him another chance first. If he tells what fetched him back, and whar he left his master, the detective, we'll let him off."

The figure of the dwarf seemed to increase in stature as these words fell upon his ears.

"Gentlemen, you ask too much," he said, bowing stiffly. "You can't find a drop of traitor blood in Romeo's veins." And then he turned to the street ready for the ordeal.

"Is the detective Mormon Paul's friend?"

No answer.

"Does he want the Saint for some old crime?"

Romeo's lips did not part.

"Oh, let him go, Ajax. We've fooled too long with the little imp already!"

Big Ajax stooped a little when he looked at Romeo again.

Had the giant's heart melted?

"Dart to the left," he whispered, and then straightening again, he stepped back and Romeo was free.

"Run!" cried half a dozen voices in his rear.

"We give you twenty feet, you know."

The dwarf walked forward coolly and like a person without fear.

He stepped off the distance and stopped at the limit.

"Now—go!"

All at once the figure of the hermit sport darted off like a missile hurled from an engine of war.

Instead of running in a straight line he darted to the left.

A dozen revolvers blended their reports and little jets of fire made a weird semi-circle behind Romeo.

Crack! crack! crack! continued the pistols of Bumblebee City.

Romeo ran down the narrow gap that opened between two cabins.

Despite his sudden spring for liberty, he felt a pain in one of his arms, and knew that several bullets had passed through his garments.

"It was through fire by the skin of one's teeth!" gasped the dwarf, when he found himself at the edge of the camp. "Thanks to the advice of Big Ajax, I am alive to report to Don Domingo when I find him. I don't think we will find him. I don't think we will find Mormon Paul here. That rascal—"

Romeo broke his own sentence, or rather a singular sound broke it for him.

He turned half-round in his tracks, and the next moment was looking at a figure which stood like a statue before him and barely a dozen feet away.

Romeo hugged the cabin by which he had halted, and stared at the apparition with eyes distended by astonishment.

While he looked the figure moved.

It had the almost noiseless tread of the night prowler, and the dwarf's eyes were keen enough to see that he had discovered the very man who had cost Bumblebee City its best blood.

"What brings the Mormon back? Doesn't he know that his life won't be worth a snap of the fingers where he is going? Why, they'll massacre him in his tracks, and without the shadow of ceremony. Then, Don Domingo will lose his game."

The figure in the camp halted while Romeo spoke his thoughts.

"I'm going to let the captain of this camp suffice for the present!" he exclaimed. "There is another nest where my work is needed. There are two captains who shall feel the avenging hand of the man they like to dub a Mormon viper. I shall go to the other camp, while the dogs of this one bury their dead."

Romeo held his breath while the man, Mormon Paul, the outlaw, passed him, gliding toward the end of the camp.

"Changed your mind, eh?" grinned the dwarf. "You have turned back before you had a chance to singe your hair. That is sensible, Mormon Paul. Now, let me find you beyond Bumblebee City, and we will look after the traps that exist there."

Ten minutes later the figure of a well-built man leaned against a tree, from whose trunk could be seen the few lights that indicated the location of the mining capital of the Silver Hills.

"Why not go back to the old ground?" this man said, speaking aloud to himself. "What is the girl to me now? She would betray me wherever we went. Her confounded beauty is what entrapped me, and more than once it brought me to the gates of death. I have even felt my neck in the noose, and all because of the bird whose plumage captured me in Mormon-dom. I can go back and reorganize the old band. The twenty million francs are mine yet for the taking. The sleuth who lost Cartouche in Colorado years ago, is now on the old trail; but what of it? The secret is mine and nobody can wrench it from me. What has become of Silken Grip, and the rest? I long for the old grounds. I have played Mormon long enough. The Wild West of America has been my prison all these years—for what? I am hunted for my life. The Secret Tribunal of the church has sentenced me to death. The hand of every man in the banded camps is against me. I have intensified that hatred by dealing with Chispa Chick as he has been dealt with. I have one more stroke to make. It shall fall in the other camp, and on more heads than one. The girl is there—the girl whose Gentile blood can never be made to flow through Mormon veins. Mormonism! I hate it. But it has helped me to carry out more than one scheme. For five years I have been lost to the world, and the sleuth-hound who tracked Cartouche from Paris has lost the scent."

Romeo did not see the man who talked thus to himself under the tree on the elevated trail.

The dwarf had lost sight of the person he had tracked from Bumblebee City, and had gone to Richard Redfire with the information he had obtained at the risk of his life.

He found the detective, but not where he had left him.

He delivered his report and saw the eyes of the tireless sleuth glow with a fervor that spoke his feelings.

"Now for the final play, Romeo," said Richard. "The man has thrown aside his false skin and is clad in his true one once more. If there was no other proof, I would know one thing."

"What is that?"

"I have found Cartouche."

"Do you think he will take the regular trail to Deuce-o'-Diamonds?"

"He is no fool. He knows that the death of Chispa Chick has crossed the divide on the wings of the wind."

"Then, he will take the unbeaten trails?"

"Most assuredly."

Romeo looked around.

It was morning light again and Richard Redfire was looking down the mountain.

All at once a man's head came into view for a moment, then it disappeared as suddenly as it had been seen.

"Hark!" exclaimed Romeo, catching the detective's arm.

"I heard it. It was the crack of a Winchester."

"And yonder staggers the man who got the bullet!"

Both Richard Redfire and Romeo bounded forward, the detective outstripping the dwarf in his eagerness.

Romeo had caught sight of the same object which had crossed the ferret's line of vision.

A human figure had pitched across the trail where the head was seen a few moments before.

All at once Richard the sleuth planted himself firmly on the ground, and Romeo looking in the direction toward which his face was turned, saw a dozen men armed with Winchesters and revolvers.

"The pards of Deuce-o'-Diamonds!" burst from the dwarf's throat. "My old friend, Lucky Livingstone is at their head, and the sleuth has lost his man!"

Then Romeo looked again at Richard Redfire and saw that he stood over the body of a prostrate man, and that in his right hand he clutched a cocked six-shooter.

Richard had found Cartouche!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SLEUTH HOLDS THE FORT.

THE aspect of the detective seemed to awe even the rough crowd whose members stood off a little distance and looked at him.

Romeo threw a glance toward Lucky Livingstone and his companions.

"What will they do?" the hermit sport asked himself. "The odds are against the sleuth of two shores. Will the pards of the mountains let him have his man? He is dead enough from what I can see, but Richard seems to want him all the same."

The visages of the men who faced the American detective said plainly, "You can't have that man!" but still Romeo wondered what they would do.

"Well, you have found your quarry—found him at last!" exclaimed Lucky Luke, and there was a tone of poorly hidden triumph in his voice.

"Yes," came over the space from Richard Redfire's tongue. "The man I have found has been my quest these many years, as you ought to know, Lucky Livingstone."

"Then you think you have found the man of the one great secret?"

"I stand over Cartouche."

"Cartouche, with a Winchester bullet in his body!"

"By Jericho! there's some life left in Mormon Paul!" ejaculated Romeo as the man under the detective stirred and looked bewilderingly at the person whose voice he had just heard. "Now they will have a brush for the prize of the game."

Lucky Livingstone came forward until a sudden upward movement of Richard's hand drew him to a halt.

"Stand off!" said the sleuth with a quick firmness that impressed the ten men who stood behind Lucky Luke.

"There's life left in the man we have a right to kill," answered the Mormon hater of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

"The right to kill him, eh? When did you acquire it?"

"When he shed the blood of one of the sons of Colorado."

"That was—"

"When he killed Chispa Chick of Bumble Bee."

"We will not argue that point. The man at my feet belongs first of all to Justice."

"That is right."

"He must answer first for a crime which was not committed in Colorado."

"He answers for the death of Captain Chispa."

Lucky Livingstone looked back at his companions as he finished.

Ten feet separated them, but the glance drew them forward and the next minute they could have touched the man by whom they were led.

"Why not give Mormon Paul his choice?" asked one of the men.

He was met with a frown by Lucky Luke, but before any one could reply the man on the ground jerked himself out, from under the detective's feet and raised his body half-way from the grass.

"I have no choice!" came through close-set teeth in a mad hiss. "If ever a man found himself between death and the dragon I am that one."

Some of Livingstone's men laughed.

Without the move of a muscle Richard Redfire looked toward the two black eyes peering at the scene from among the bushes and spoke two words which the mountain men distinctly heard.

"The horse!"

Romeo disappeared.

"Now comes the tug-of-war," thought the dwarfed sport's mind. "Lucky Livingstone's eyes will catch fire when they see me. He hasn't forgotten how he pitched backward in Bumble Bee City when I touched the trigger. I didn't want his life at the time, and I'm glad I did not take it. I want no man's blood, but the right of self-defense belongs to all men—even to dwarfs, ha, ha!" and the eyes of the speaker snapped as he laughed.

"Gentlemen, this man must go with me," the detective resumed, addressing the pards of Deuce-of-Diamonds while the gliding figure of Romeo was yet in sight.

"Do you take him back to Paris?"

"Why to Paris?"

"He is Cartouche."

"And Mormon Paul as well. No, Lucky Luke. I want this man for a purpose. He knows

why I have followed him. He knows, too, why I stand over him ready to take him by force if I cannot get him otherwise."

"That is true," came from Mormon Paul, his eyes riveted glaringly upon the sleuth. "If he takes me, he will find a pair of lips sealed as closely as the lids of the book of fate. I will go with Monsieur Ledocq, my old ferret friend."

"To France, Mormon Paul?"

"Yes, to France!"

A singular look overspread Lucky Livingstone's countenance.

He looked back at his men and said, in a low whisper:

"I am going to pretend to give up the fight."

"What! let the shadow from Europe take off the man who killed Chispa Chick!"

"For the present, yes."

"It may mean for good, if he gets an advantage."

"It shall not be for good. I have not yet played my favorite hand."

"We trust you, Lucky Luke."

The man from Deuce-o'-Diamonds was about to address Richard Redfire when Romeo appeared, leading the American detective's horse.

"The little demon, whose scalp I want!" flashed Lucky Livingstone. "But one man at a time," and then he turned to the detective, who had ordered Romeo to lead the steed to where Mormon Paul was watching the proceedings with an eye that did not lose a single particular.

"Take your man, Monsieur Ledocq," said Livingstone, and at the decision Mormon Paul started like a disappointed man. "Take your man back to Paris if you can. Remember, though, that while you are in Colorado with him, he is Mormon Paul and not Cartouche. We don't agree not to help him out of your hands. We remember that he is a man of many names and many crimes. We keep for him a halter as long as he remains on Colorado territory, a better rope than the one that noosed him at the edge of Camp Secret, the retreat of the exiles. Take your man. There he is! Cartouche goes away with you without a hand raised to keep him back; but, by the gods, Richard Redfire! Mormon Paul must some day pay for the red work in Bumblebee City."

"When I have finished with him, he may answer your charges," was the reply.

"We understand," said Lucky Luke with a gesture of impatience. "No one—not even yourself—knows how badly the man is wounded. He ought to have a bullet in his vitals, for the person who tumbled him seldom misses with a Winchester at eighty yards."

"I'm not a dead man by a good stretch of the string," muttered Mormon Paul. "The time will come when Lucky Livingstone will wish that his shot had been more fatal."

The men of Deuce-o'-Diamonds offered no resistance when the detective gave Mormon Paul his hands and assisted him to his feet, then helped him to the saddle, and when he was seated firmly there with his hands wound into the animal's mane, Richard Redfire quietly grasped the rein.

"Good-day, gentlemen," he smiled, turning to the men who had witnessed these proceedings with feelings which need not be here described. "Forget not that the man who is Mormon Paul to you is to Richard Redfire and Sybil the Nameless, Cartouche, the Vampire of Paris, and the Wolf of the Rue des Morte."

Mormon Paul started violently as if the last word had sent an arrow into his flesh.

"Take him! take him, Captain Ledocq. We know that you are in the employ of a woman—that you expect to wrench from the man on the horse a secret pertaining to her life. If he is a fool, he will obligingly open his mouth and tell all he knows. You are entitled to all the good-luck that may befall you, but it is far to Paris, and between Sybil and the secret may lie years and years of mystery."

The next minute a horse led by a handsome man went down the trail which was easily followed.

Mormon Paul watched his captor with a half-smile at his lips.

Romeo walked near, his look alternating from man to man, and his eyes filled with wonder as the way grew long.

"This is not the end of it. Lucky Livingstone admonished Richard Redfire that he was still in Colorado. That means all he said and more. It means that Mormon Paul is to pay for Chispa Chick if coolness and cunning can cancel the debt."

Before the detective and his captive were out of sight, Lucky Livingstone wheeled on his band and burst into a laugh.

"Boys, what six of you will promise to meet me in Denver at the earliest possible moment?" he asked.

Ten men spoke, and the answer of all was the same.

"I may need all six; I may not need one," continued the man of Deuce o' Diamonds. "There is no danger of Don Domingo getting at the secret between here and Denver. There he will stand Mormon Paul, or Cartouche, face to face with Sybil the Nameless. Then for the secret."

"Who is this woman, Captain Luke?"

"She does not know herself."

"A human mystery, then?"

"Yes."

"Does she deserve to know?"

Lucky Livingstone looked at the speaker.

"I don't know much about the case. I know that some years ago this same detective chased Cartouche from Paris to lose him in Colorado."

"Was he after the secret then?"

"He was."

"If that is the case, I give Sybil the Nameless the benefit of the doubt. I don't want to go to Denver. Let Don Domingo have his man."

"Let him keep him," echoed another man.

Lucky Livingstone bit his lip under the raven mustache that shaded it.

"I ask no man to go to Denver," said he. "In yon direction lie the shanties of Deuce-o'-Diamonds. You men can go back!"

"But you, Captain Luke?"

"I intend to see that this persistent trail-dog gets—nothing!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SHADOWS IN THE NIGHT.

DENVER once more!

We saw it last, as the reader will readily recall, in the early morning light, when Silken Grip stood face to face with Richard Redfire, but now we return to it in the night, when its dens of every description are in full blast.

Near the door of the Golden Ophir, the most famous of the numerous "banks" of the mountain capital, stands a man whose keen dark eyes scrutinize everybody who crosses the threshold.

His forehead is partly concealed by the broad brim of a dark-colored hat, and the face, or that portion which is visible, is as dark as a Cuban's.

This personage stands where he cannot be easily noticed, and the one hand that rests on his hip suggests that he has a weapon of some kind ready for instant use.

But whether knife or revolver the closest observer cannot determine.

Ask this silent watcher his name and he will answer in tones that confirm his words, Pablo Paquita.

As the minutes flit by he grows impatient.

It can be seen without much trouble that he eyes closer those who come out than those who go in.

Does he think that the person he wants to see is inside fighting the tiger over the cloth of the Golden Ophir?

At last one man enters who draws from Pablo Paquita a second look.

"They look near enough alike to be brothers," mutters the man at the door, and his eyes follow the visitor till he is lost to view.

If he had followed the man he would have witnessed an interview that might have had some interest for him.

The visitor to the Golden Ophir entered the room where the tables were, and looked over them one after another until he saw a man who was playing quietly with a lot of chips before him.

Then he stole forward and touched the player on the shoulder.

The touch had the effect of diverting the gambler's attention from the game and the eyes of the two men met.

There was instant recognition.

A moment later the man at the table coolly pocketed his winnings and vacated his place for another who was ready to try his luck, and the twain walked to the lower end of the room.

"You did not stay the two weeks out, Moro," smiled the gambler, looking into the face of his companion. "I know you did not find Sybil, our late fair prisoner, and your appearance here tells me that the mystery of Cartouche remains unsolved."

"I did not find Sybil, but another did."

"That is true. The very man we did not want to find her, tracked her down. She is here now—"

"In Denver?"

"In Denver!"

"Then we will have to repeat our game."

"When we find her; not before," and the speaker rounded up his sentence with a little laugh.

"What! haven't you been able to discover her?" cried the other. "Where have your eyes been?"

"I was on the trail once, but a revolver admonished me to go slow."

"In whose hands was it?"

"Monsieur Ledocq's."

"Oh! And you went 'slow,' of course?"

"Yes. I want to go back a winner in the game. I did not come to America to leave my bones in a mountain graveyard. But what about Cartouche, Moro?"

"I chased a phantom till I was undecided."

"Aha! You thought you were going to find the old captain when you got on Mormon Paul's trail?"

"That is it. Richard Redfire is following the same blind lead. He is risking his head every day to catch a man who will do him no good. I did not leave the trail till I was satisfied. Then I went to Chispa Chick and offered to turn the

Mormon over to the camp; but he would not listen to me. I know when he would have given a good deal for the exile; but all at once he says he doesn't want the dog's neck. I am ready for the next play now. We must give Denver a complete overhauling. If Sybil is here she must be found before the sleuth comes back. You know for what we crossed the sea, captain?—the oath or a life!

During this conversation Pablo Paquita with his dark eyes waited on the outside.

"I've made an enemy since crossing to Denver," suddenly resumed Silken Grip.

"Over the table, I presume?"

"Yes. There is a fellow here named Paquita—a man with mixed blood in his veins. By Jupiter! he has the passion of a tiger, and my throat has felt his Satanic fingers. Once or twice I have caught a shadow at my heels while I was trying to unearth Sybil, but when I turned on him he vanished like smoke. I don't fear the yellow rascal, but it isn't very pleasant to have a spy of his description at one's heels."

"I shouldn't fancy it myself," said Moro with a shrug of the shoulders. "Why can't we finish the spy first?"

"Find him!" laughed Silken Grip. "It is no easy matter to pick him up in Denver. I have sought him more than once, but he keeps out of my way when I want him."

"Then he will be hard to trap?"

"A fox always is."

Pablo Paquita grew tired about this time.

With a growl of displeasure he cast a parting look at the door of the "bank" and walked away.

If he had waited another minute he would have been rewarded, for the door opened and Silken Grip and Moro appeared.

"Hold! look at that man yonder!" exclaimed Moro clutching his companion's arm.

"What man?"

"The one under yonder light. I left him in the Silver Hills. He is a power there."

Silken Grip leaned forward with eagerness and curiosity mingled in his eyes, and Moro saw him watch the man indicated for several moments.

"What does he call himself now?" was the abrupt question.

"Lucky Luke of Deuce-o'-Diamonds," Moro answered.

"I presume the name fits him?"

"You know him, then?"

"Yes; it is Blankmere."

"You are right. He recognized me when I went back to Bumblebee City after leaving you. We can trust him if we want to."

"But I do not intend to. Come! let him play his own game; we will play ours. Something brought that man from the mountains to Denver. It is hardly possible that Mormon Paul is here."

Moro shook his head doubtfully.

At that moment Lucky Livingstone walked away, and as the two men noticed his gait and magnificent form, they knew they had seen Blankmere the old Parisian scamp.

"I would like to know his mission," muttered Silken Grip. "We don't care a fig for Mormon Paul, but Blankmere may be on the trail of the man he hates so royally."

"Richard Redfire?"

"The detective."

"If you think Lucky Luke was carried here by his desire to find Monsieur Ledocq, he might be followed to advantage."

The following moment Silken Grip turned back and shadowed the man for the mines.

This was no difficult task, for Livingstone did not seem to avoid public inspection.

His burly figure attracted more than ordinary attention, and those who looked at him saw that he was a man from the outside.

The two companions kept together but at a respectful distance from the shadowed sport, and Lucky Luke seemed totally oblivious of the espionage.

"Yonder is my man—Pablo Paquita!" suddenly cried Silken Grip.

"Show him to me," whispered Moro.

"He stands in the shadow of yon post. You will have to look sharp, Moro, for he seems to be the shadow itself. That is the fellow who struck three times with his knife before Richard Redfire took him off. He is watching Lucky Livingstone more than us."

"I have found him!" exclaimed Moro. "So, that is Pablo Paquita?"

"That is he."

"Will you let me manage him?"

"You will have to be careful."

"I think I understand him. The sooner we get shut of that yellow ferret the better!"

"That is true."

"Then let me have the honor. I haven't done much since I left the old haunts—scarcely anything beyond springing the trap on Zero, the hunchback, in New York. Follow Lucky Luke! He is going to enter the Grand Colorado—an excellent place for an interview if you want one. Give Pablo Paquita over to me."

"Take him, Moro; but look out for the claw he carries in his belt."

A light laugh was the reply of the man who, separating from Silken Grip, started back.

The figure of Lucky Livingstone had disappeared, but not before Silken Grip saw him cross the step of the hotel whose register we once saw him scan for the name of Richard Redfire the shadower.

Pablo Paquita did not stir from his shadow.

It cost Silken Grip an effort to prevent a collision between his yellow-skinned enemy and himself as he passed him on his way to the hotel.

"I've left the dog to Moro, and I won't interfere," he thought, as he almost touched Pablo whose eyes snapped.

For a moment the broken gambler watched Silken Grip.

When he vanished beyond the door of the Grand Colorado, Pablo walked in an opposite direction.

He had a man at his heels before he was a rod from the spot.

Moro was carrying out his pet scheme.

Pablo Paquita seemed carried forward by a desire to impart some important information to some one.

He turned suddenly into a cross street where lights were not so numerous.

The man behind him quickened his gait.

Reaching down into an inner pocket he drew forth a small vial which he uncorked but kept his finger over the mouth.

The next instant he was almost up to the spy.

"Silken Grip evidently forgot the vial!" he laughed. "It is as potent in Colorado as it used to be in France."

Then one hand shot forward and caught Pablo Paquita's shoulder.

The yellow man whirled at the touch.

Quick as thought Moro threw forward the hand that clutched the bottle, and the following moment it came in contact with Pablo's face.

A half-stifled cry followed.

The night ferret staggered back, and tore himself from Moro's clutch.

Then he came forward with all the madness of a tiger's plunge, and the man with the bottle found himself seized and thrown to the ground while he broke his own instrument of death in his hand!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WANTED—VENGEANCE.

PABLO PAQUITA did not stop to finish his work apparently. Whether he thought he was leaving a dead man on the ground or not, he fled from the field and was soon lost in the darkness.

Once or twice he broke out into a low chuckle of inward satisfaction, and while the fit was on, his little black eyes snapped prodigiously.

A few minutes later he appeared at the door of a plain frame house, and his knuckles bestowed several peculiar raps upon it.

As the portal was opened he dashed in, but in a moment started back from the scene that met his gaze.

A man was bound in a chair before him. His arms were secured by a rope which passed across his breast, though his hands were left free.

Pablo Paquita stared insolently at this man for he was a stranger, and the occupant of the chair gave back the look with interest.

"I don't understand this," said Pablo glancing at the person who had admitted him to the house, a handsome woman who seemed to enjoy his astonishment.

"That man is Cartouche," was the answer.

"He would probably tell you, Pablo, that he is Mormon Paul; but people go by their true names in this house."

A smile passed over the prisoner's face.

"Richard Redfire found his man at last, and that is he," continued the woman who was Sybil the Nameless.

"Aha! I have heard Richard speak of his hunt. Is this the man with the secret?" And the yellow gambler leaned toward Cartouche and searched him with his eye.

"I am the man," said the prisoner of the chair in response to Paquita's look which was a silent interrogation. "They tracked me across the sea from Paris, and left me unhunted for years; but at last the same sleuth, my old friend Monsieur Ledocq, came back to the trail and here I am."

A grin finished the prisoner's sentence, and he added to it a glance at Sybil who was watching him with an intensity that seemed to take her breath.

"What has he told you, Sybil?" asked Pablo, going over to the woman and lowering his voice.

"Nothing, Pablo."

"Can't you get the secret from him?"

"Not yet."

"Must you have it?"

"I must! It concerns, my name, my very existence. Without it I am nobody—a waif on the world."

Pablo's brow suddenly grew dark.

"Has Captain Richard tried him?" he asked.

"He has taken the first step."

"Well?"

"Cartouche has declared that he will never give up the secret."

"The devil's agent!" came through Pablo

Paquita's teeth, and he sent a fierce look through his dark lashes toward the man in the chair.

"Richard must succeed soon," he resumed.

"Why, Pablo?"

"There are others on the ground."

"You mean Silken Grip."

"There are others still. They came to-night," Sybil started.

"Who are they?"

"One is Lucky Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds—a man who came to Denver a year ago and went back a nabob. He did it all in three nights' play."

Mormon Paul—we may still call him thus—raised his head as if he had caught the sound of Lucky Luke's name.

"He heard you," whispered Sybil.

Pablo Paquita whirled upon the exile.

Their eyes met.

"Is that man here?" asked Mormon Paul.

"What man?"

"Livingstone, of Deuce-o'-Diamonds."

"What if he is?"

"Will you tell me the truth?"

"Yes!" cried Pablo, springing toward Mormon Paul. "Lucky Luke is here."

"Alone?"

"I think, alone."

The prisoner looked at Sybil.

"Where is Monsieur Ledocq?"

"He should be here now."

At that moment the child of mystery went to the door, and opened it in response to the same signal Pablo had given.

"Your man is here," announced Sybil, glancing at Mormon Paul, whose eyes were already riveted upon the man who had just entered.

"They tell me that Lucky Livingstone is here," he exclaimed.

"He is in Denver, and he could not have been far behind us."

"Who is that man, Captain Richard?"

"Lucky Luke, of course."

"But he is more than that."

"Do you think so?" smiled the detective.

"I know it."

"Have you forgotten Blankmere?"

A cry burst from Mormon Paul's lips.

"Is Lucky Livingstone Blankmere?" he cried. The sleuth nodded.

Mormon Paul leaned back in his chair and appeared to fight a mental battle in the presence of all.

"He is the wretch who betrayed me once!" said he, after a brief silence.

"I recollect it, Cartouche. His play under cover cheated you out of a fortune."

"Out of more than that. I did not care for money then," was the response. "But why have I failed to recognize the dog?"

"He has traded eyes since he left France."

"Traded eyes?" echoed Mormon Paul.

"Yes; he lost one eye in a camp row, and the new one he wears is a shade darker, and completely alters his appearance."

"That is why, is it? Captain Richard, will you give me a chance to pay the fox of the slums back?"

"On one condition."

"Name it."

"You must first give us the secret."

Mormon Paul winced.

"Will you treat with me on no other condition?" he asked.

"I will not."

"Well, revenge is the sweetest thing some men can know," he answered with a grim smile.

"If it had not been for Blankmere, now called Lucky Livingstone, I would not have lost the young countless years ago, nor would I be in your hands, Monsieur Ledocq. I would cross the sea to strike that infamous villain. I want to show him that the man he dropped at eighty yards still possesses the teeth and claws of the tiger. Will you give me the opportunity for the secret, Richard Redfire?"

"You shall have him!"

The answer came from lips that were not expected to reply.

Sybil the Nameless had spoken.

"She has answered you," said the detective.

"I am ready to keep any bargain she makes." A step carried the woman of mystery to Mormon Paul's chair, and the next moment she was gazing anxiously into his face.

"Your enemy for the secret," she went on. "It shall be a fair bargain. I will find him myself if necessary, and he shall stand before you for punishment. Blankmere never had his hand in the plot against me, but he has had it in others equally heinous. Out with it, Cartouche. I have waited all my life for this hour. I knew you were the only person who can name me. I have crossed the sea to find you—you whom I have not seen since the night you entered my room in Paris and wanted me to take the awful oath which would keep me nameless forever."

Mormon Paul settled coolly back into his chair while he looked at the woman.

"I want some assurance that I shall meet Livingstone face to face. What pledge do you give?"

"My life, if necessary!" cried Sybil.

"And the sacred word of Richard Redfire!" exclaimed the detective.

"It is enough!"

"Thank Heaven! at last!"
And there came over Sybil's face a gleam of unutterable joy.

One hour later, a man entered the Grand Colorado and leaned over the counter, behind which stood the portly and officious landlord.

"Has my friend come back?" asked this person, with a tinge of anxiety in his tones.

"Not yet."

The stranger looked at his watch.

"I am a mite previous," he observed with a smile, and then he passed into the bar-room.

"Now that we have united our forces, I ought to succeed," he said to himself. "Lucky Livingstone wants the man sleuth; I want the woman! It is a fair divide on the surface, though I think I have the lion's share. Moro hasn't reported yet concerning his bout with Pablo Paquita. I told him to beware, as the fellow is dangerous if he does let rage blind him sometimes. The next time I will see that my cage holds the bird I catch, and then there will be no Richard Redfire to open the door."

As the speaker, who was Silken Grip, turned toward the hotel office after a few minutes of waiting in the bar-room, he came face to face with Lucky Livingstone, of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

"I have found the trail!" exclaimed Lucky Luke, and then he laughed. "It is a keen fox who can beat me long!"

Silken Grip did not try to choke off the ejaculation of joy that rose to his lips.

"Show me the hiding-place!" he cried. "We will not wait for Moro."

"It would be useless, anyhow," interrupted Livingstone. "Moro will never come."

"Why not?"

"They have just found a man dead in the middle of a street."

"Moro?" exclaimed Silken Grip.

"It is Moro."

"The yellow athlete was too much for him. His knife got in its work."

"No. The only wound about the dead man is a severe cut in the palm, made by a small bottle, which he must have crushed with his grip."

"Ah! I understand! Well, never mind; Pablo Paquita is responsible for Moro's death, just the same. But show me the trail of the sleuth and the siren."

"I will. Follow me!"

And Lucky Luke led the way out.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE END OF THE SKEIN.

"Now, show me my old traitor. Keep your word, Captain Redfire, and stand me face to face with Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds."

"I will."

It was about the time of the brief interview at the Grand Colorado that these words were exchanged in a house not far from the hotel.

Mormon Paul had just finished a recital which had held Sybil the Nameless spellbound from first to last, and while he addressed the detective who had answered promptly, he left his chair and stood in the middle of the room.

"How do you want to meet Lucky Luke?" asked Sybil.

"I care not how, so the chances are equal."

"If you conquer him—what?"

"Let the future answer for itself."

"Will you go back to Paris?"

"Do you think I'd go back to the banded camps?" smiled Mormon Paul. "Why, my life wouldn't be worth a hair there. The presence of Livingstone in Denver tells me that I am still hunted by the wolves of the mountains; you know for what?"

"Couldn't you have spared Chispa Chick?"

"Why should I have spared him?" cried Cartouche. "He was the man who first hurled me into the shadow of the noose. I would have gone back to him if there had been a man waiting for me at every cabin. Now, let me see Lucky Luke."

"In this house?"

"Yes, or anywhere! You will not find Cartouche hard to please, Richard Redfire. You have the secret, and Sybil is the Nameless no longer. She can go back to France and put her hands upon twenty millions of francs, and assert her right to a name which is without a blemish. She will never have to take the oath for which Silken Grip and Moro crossed the ocean. You will find the written proofs where I have sworn they are. This wound inflicted by Livingstone's rifle gives me much trouble. An inch lower down and Sybil would not know what she does, and your hunt, Monsieur Ledocq, would be a failure. My steel vest could not altogether stop the bullet of a Winchester, but it deflected it enough to save my life. Having kept my promise, keep yours, Richard."

When the detective of two worlds stepped from the house a figure, apparently in waiting on the outside, glided forward.

"Did he tell all, captain?" asked a voice, and the detective looked down into the anxious face and keen eyes of Pablo Paquita.

"Everything, Pablo."

The yellow sport manifested his delight in a grin.

"What is your part of the bargain with him?"

"I am to bring him Lucky Luke of Deuce-o'-Diamonds."

"He shall have him!"

"Dog wants to encounter dog, Pablo. You understand; an old grudge over a forgotten bone."

"After they have met, what?"

"There may be mutual destruction," smiled the detective.

"But in case Mormon Paul comes off victorious?"

"I have made no promises in view of such an event."

Pablo was silent a few seconds.

"I think we can hand him over to the avengers of the two camps."

"Why so, Pablo?"

"There are strange men in Denver—five, ten, twenty of them."

"When did they come?"

"I have just counted a dozen."

"Where is Lucky Luke?"

"At the Grand Colorado."

"Let us go."

Pablo Paquita's eyes had not deceived him; there were strange men in Denver.

They had come in a body, but had entered the city singly and at different places.

Without an exception they were dark-skinned athletes whose bearing smacked of the unrestrained life of camp and mountain.

They seemed to saunter idly through Denver, but there was a determined purpose in all they did, and their eyes lost sight of nothing.

Paquita guessed their identity when he first saw them, but he mistook their mission; that was all.

They had not come so much for Mormon Paul as for the man whose coolness and persistence had cheated them out of a victim—Richard Redfire, the shadower!

Like a pack of hounds in search of a lost trail, they scattered after entering Denver, but now and then they had come together and compared notes.

It was a determined hunt for a human life.

Silken Grip and Lucky Livingstone knew nothing of the arrival of the Colorado pards.

They had completed their interview at the Grand Colorado, and the boss of Deuce-o'-Diamonds had promised to lead his companion to the trail he had accidentally discovered.

"Hello! the captain!" exclaimed one of a group of four men to whom the pair appeared as they left the hotel. "He has found the man who took the woman called Sybil from Durg's. Are they friends?"

The quartette eyed the couple, hardly knowing what to do, and when Livingstone and Silken Grip moved off down the street they let them vanish unfollowed.

That decision sealed the doom of one man.

"Halt, gentlemen," rung out a voice at which both Lucky Luke and his comrade stopped. "Pablo Paquita, you will take care of the man on the left. I will walk back with Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds."

A hissing sound came through the teeth of Lucky Luke.

He knew the man who spoke!

Richard Redfire had again found his quarry!

The eyes of Pablo Paquita snapped when he found his old antagonist of the gaming tables at his mercy, and Silken Grip gave the yellow sport a look which did not mend matters between them.

"Come with me, captain," continued the detective, addressing Livingstone. "The game is not played out; but you are wanted to help the last act through."

"I?"

"Yes; you will learn how, presently. As for your friend, I have the pleasure to inform him that the lips of the secret-keeper have been unsealed, and that all is known."

Silken Grip received this revelation with a start.

Lucky Luke saw something in Richard Redfire's hand which might have secured a prompt obedience of orders.

At any rate, he walked up the street with the detective, and scarcely a word was exchanged till they reached a house where Richard rapped in a peculiar manner.

"Who is in there?" demanded Livingstone, hesitating at the step.

"A man who wants to see you."

"Mormon Paul?"

"No, Cartouche," smiled Richard.

"As Livingstone of Deuce-o'-Diamonds, I have no business with Cartouche."

"But as Cartouche he has business with Blankmere! Go in, captain!"

As he entered a room a figure rose before him, and then Cartouche and his old rival stood face to face.

"Mormon Paul and Lucky Livingstone are no more," cried the detective's long-hunted quarry, as his eyes seemed to get ablaze. "Tonight it is Cartouche and Blankmere."

Lucky Luke stood like a man bewildered.

"I have prepared the ground. Yon room, when the door is closed, is as dark as a dungeon of the Bastille. You see there a table, with two knives sticking in the center—one for each of

us. Come! The door will be locked by Monsieur Ledocq, Richard Redfire, when we have entered, and the room will not be opened before to-morrow. Is Blankmere afraid to meet the man he played against in Paris? Does he fear the hunted person who now carries one of his bullets in his body?"

"No! Let us settle forever the feud begun on the banks of the Seine!"

With a look of wild delight Mormon Paul stepped across the room and threw open a door, disclosing an apartment entirely dark.

"Do your part," he said, with a glance at Richard Redfire, and the following moment both men vanished, and the door was closed.

The American man-hunter stepped forward and turned a key in the lock; then, with a solemn mien he walked out of the house.

"Leopard and tiger in the dark," said he to himself. "The hunt of years is at an end."

It was morning again in Denver.

Pablo Paquita came bright and early upon one of the most prominent streets, a cigarette between his lips.

There was a look of unusual pleasure in the yellow sport's eyes, and his step seemed to possess a new springiness.

He met in front of the Grand Colorado a little individual who eyed him with a good deal of curiosity.

"By the saints! 'tis Romeo!" exclaimed Paquita, and then he caught the dwarf's arm and laughed.

"Where is the captain, Romeo?" he asked.

"He has just left the city—he and Sybil."

"What! so early?"

"What should keep them, Pablo? The game is out. The shadower has solve the secret, and Sybil is wishing she had wings."

"But Mormon Paul and Lucky Luke? Have you been to the house?"

"Only to look at it," answered Romeo with a shudder. "What did you do with Silken Grip, let me ask?"

"Ho! I let him slip through my fingers at the right time. He can do nothing now. Ere this he is out of Denver. Let us go up to the house."

"Not for the world! I have business elsewhere. Good-day, Pablo! I think I ought to say 'farewell!'" and Romeo ran away, disappearing in a moment.

It was Pablo Paquita who went up to the house which had been Sybil's retreat since her rescue from the mountain cavern by Redfire.

He entered and found a key in the lock of an inside door.

Not a sound came to Pablo's ears from within. It was dark and silent as the grave when he opened the door.

Then the yellow sport stepped nervously into the room, and threw some light upon the scene by opening at once a shutter.

Ha! What a sight! He looked, with his little eyes almost starting from his head!

On the floor lay two forms, motionless.

Pablo bent over them.

"Hyena and wolf! This is as it should be!" and without touching either he went away, leaving the rivals and enemies where they had fought in the dark.

Already Richard Redfire and Sybil were miles from Denver.

The mountain men who had come up from the banded camps went back not altogether dissatisfied.

"This settles the contest for Hazel's hand," said they. "She falls to solid Silver Dick of Deuce-o'-Diamonds."

And she did.

In course of time the fair, young victim of Mormon Paul's wiles became the wife of the handsome sport of the Silver Hills, and we may believe that she never regretted the end of Lucky Luke, the man of two names and two lives.

Sybil went back across the continent overjoyed at last.

The confession of Cartouche had given her a substantial place in the world; she was the child of mystery no longer.

Her lineage proved to be of one of the best American families in France, and the immense fortune for which the band headed by Cartouche and Silken Grip had schemed so long, was paid over to her on the establishment of her identity.

Romeo was richly rewarded for his services, and when he went East he concluded to transfer his residence permanently from the Silver Hills.

Richard Redfire found that he had won more than a mere triumph over villainy and crime by his long and eventful chase, and to-day the luxurious home in New York presided over by Sybil, is proof enough that he did not risk his life in vain.

Monsieur Ledocq, Don Domingo, and Richard Redfire—three in one, reader—no longer hunts man and mystery in the great West.

The cool detective's great career ended when he left Mormon Paul, *alias* Cartouche, dead in the arms of his lifeless enemy—Lucky Livingstone, of Deuce-o'-Diamonds.

THE END.

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